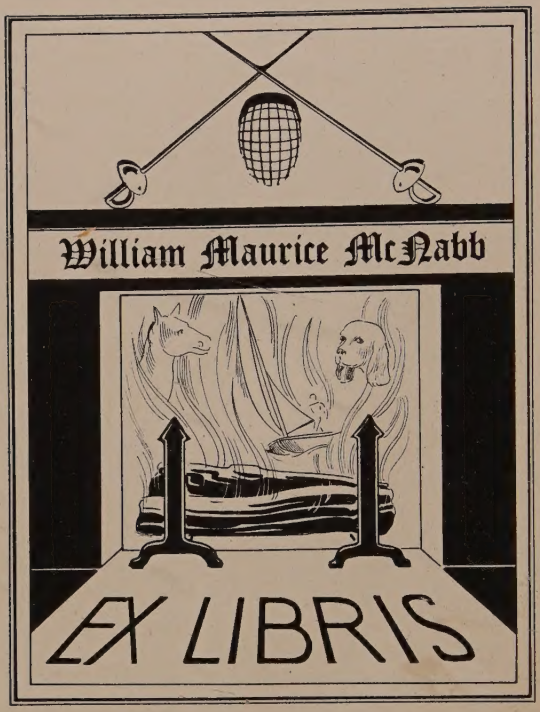
William Maurice McNabb
EX LIBRIS

Raise my body; place my head upright. I am faint in the joints of my body, my friends; lay hold of my fair-formed hands, O attendants. The dressing on my head is heavy for me to support; take it off.

PHÈDRE,—RACINE.

PHÈDRE

After an original painting by Alexander Cabanel

French Drama

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ALFRED BATES

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

JAMES P. BOYD, A.M., L.B.

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE

PROF. JOHN P. LAMBERTON

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

VOLUME VIII

London—New York

Publishers: Smart and Stanley

Copyright, 1903, by ALFRED BATES.

Entered at Stationers' Hall,
London, England.

Prologue

THE former volume on the French drama brought the record down to its golden age in the reign of Louis XIV., and closed with the death of Molière in 1693. Corneille and Racine still survived and contributed to the stage, but Corneille, enfeebled by age, could not maintain his pristine glory; and Racine, when he resumed playwriting, handled only Biblical themes, yet in these won new laurels.

Throughout the eighteenth century the theatre retained the vogue which it had gained by the ex-

traordinary brilliancy of the golden age. But the choicest of the new productions, though hailed at the time as equal or superior to the standard classics, have sunk from that high esteem, and the most are utterly forgotten. In the drama, as in every department of literature in that age, the bustling activity and influence of Voltaire are conspicuous. Thrust into the Bastile for a youthful satire, he there composed the tragedy of Œdipe, whose immediate success in 1718 gave him eminence. This place he maintained by a series of fine poems and dramas, which caught public applause. Meanwhile, he scattered biting epigrams right and left, and acquired wealth by jobbery and speculation. His power was exerted to clear the stage of the insolent nobles who interfered with the actors. Among the reforms for which he claimed credit was the enlargement of the scope of the drama by taking themes from Asia as well as Europe, from the New World as well as the Old, and from the field of pure invention. Having spent three years of banishment in England, he had learned something of Shakespeare, whom he pronounced "an inspired barbarian," yet could

borrow his ideas, while condemning his lawless methods. After middle life Voltaire's genius turned more to science, philosophy, public affairs and the propaganda of free thought. Even his dramas became a medium of enforcing his personal opinions rather than a presentation of life.

There was always a strong party opposed to Voltaire's domination. Crébillon the elder was put forward as their dramatic champion. His best play was *Rhadamiste et Zenobie*, which appeared in 1711. His surname, "the terrible," was due to his endeavor to surpass his predecessors by inspiring terror.

In comedy Le Sage leads the way. Known the world over as the author of *Gil Blas*, he earned his bread by composing petty farces. But in a higher class he wrote *Turcaret*, satirizing swindling financiers, and *Crispin Rival de son Maître*, a piece worthy of Molière, which we give in full. The most notable successor of that master of comedy was J. F. Regnard, whose own life was full of romantic surprises. His best comedies were *Le Joueur* and *Le Légataire*.

Between the standard divisions of the drama two new branches were now proposed—*Tragédie*

bourgeoise and *Comédie larmoyante*—which were designed to present possible situations in real life hitherto excluded by the inflexible rules regarding the rank of heroes and the importance of events exhibited on the stage.

The most remarkable comedy of the period before the French revolution is the *"Figaro"* of Beaumarchais, music-master, speculator and dramatist. His *Barbier de Séville* came out in 1775, and the *Mariage de Figaro* in 1784. These revivals of the Spanish comedy of intrigue foreshadow the coming political overthrow. Their careless good humor and witty gayety have been accepted by the French as genuine characteristics of the nation.

Contents.

	PAGE
SECTION I.—Racine and His Opponents	1
Iphigénie, First Appearance of	2
Corneille's Last Work	3
Racine's *Phèdre*, Analysis and Quotation	4
Corneille's *Don Juan*, Character of	22
Death of Pradon	23
Corneille Offends Racine	24
Racine's Retirement	24
SECTION II.—Formation of the Théâtre Français	27
Fontenelle's *La Comète*, Analysis of	29
Campistron, Dramas of	29
Novelties at the Théâtre Français	32
Death of Corneille	34
Racine's Tribute to Corneille	36
Review of Corneille's Drama	38
Baron's *Rendezvous des Tuileries*	39
New Dramatic Regulations	40
Persecution of the Protestants	41
Acis et Galatée, Review of	42
Campiston's *Phrasate*, Reception of	43
SECTION III.—Revival of Religious Drama	45
Racine's *Esther*, Character of	46
Racine's *Athalie*, Analysis, Quotations	49
Chancel's *Adherbal*, Reception of	67
Longpierre, Dramas of	68
Regnard, Dramatic Works of	69
Le Joueur, Reception of	73
Jean de La Fontaine, Dramas of	74
Retirement of Corneille	76

PAGE

Fortunes of the Italian Troupe 76
Regnard's *Le Distrait* 78
Racine's Downfall at Court 78
Last Days of Racine 79

SECTION IV.—Voltaire and His Times 83
Socrates, by Voltaire, Complete Translation 281
Œdipe, by Voltaire, Analysis, Quotations 86
Merope, Character of 94
Oreste, Review of 95
Brutus, Character of 96
Morte de César, Review of 97
Catiline, Analysis of 98
The Triumvirat, Description of 99
Zaire, Analysis of 100
Alzire, Review of 101
Mahomet, Complete Translation 229
Semiramis, Analysis of 103
Tancred, Foundation and Motive 104
Orphelin de la Chine, Analyzed 105
Voltaire as a Borrower, ... 105
Voltaire's Comedies 106
Changes Due to Voltaire 122
Voltaire's Treatment of the Unities 123
Voltaire's Reforms 124
Voltaire's Dread of Ridicule 127
Influence of Voltaire 129

SECTION V.—Voltaire's Contemporaries 131
Woman's Craze for Titles, by Dancourt, Complete Translation 311
Crébillon, History and Dramas of 131
Electre, by Crébillon, Analysis, Quotations 133
Rhadamiste, Character, Quotations 135
Pyrrhus, Review of 137
Crébillon and Voltaire 138
Thomas Corneille, Works of 138
Fontenelle, Dramas of 140
La Motte, Dramas of 141
Decadence of Classical Tragedy 143
Shakespeare on the French Stage 144

PAGE

SECTION VI.—Post Voltairean Drama 145
Molière's Influence on Comedy 145
Le Sage, Dramas of 147
Crispin, Rival of His Master, Complete Translation . . 195
Sentimental Comedy 149
Le Grand, Works of 150
Spirit of French Comedy 151
Destouches, Dramas of 153
La Chaussée, Works of 154
Marivaux, Plays of 157
Opera, Review of 160
Comic Opera 163
Vaudeville 164
Diderot as a Critic 165
Beaumarchais, Dramatic Works of 168
Ducis' Adaptations of Shakespeare 170
French Theatre in Eighteenth Century 170
High Comedy and Tragedy 171
Schlegel on French Actors 173
Marie Anne Dangeville as Actress 174
Marie Françoise Dumesnil, Actress 179
Rivalry of Clairon 184
Sentimental Plays 187
The Theatre Under the First Empire 187
Decadence of the Drama 189
The Dramatic Unities 189
The French and the Classic Drama 191
The Drama of Racine and Voltaire 192

Illustrations.

FACING PAGE

PHEDRE ..... *Frontispiece*
After an original painting by Alexander Cabanel

THE FORESHADOWING OF THE REVOLUTION ..... *Prologue*
After an original drawing by A. Raschel

ACIS AND GALATEA 42
After an original painting by L. Thiersch

CATILINE AND CICERO 98
After an original painting by Prof. Maccari

SEMIRAMIS 103
After an original painting by W. de Leftwitch Dodge

French Drama.

I.

Racine and His Opponents.

Racine, though highly esteemed by Louis XIV, had made enemies at court. His demeanor was usually marked by a cold and almost haughty reserve. His sarcastic wit had been too freely exercised not to inflict many ever-open wounds. His ingratitude toward the Solitaries of Port Royal had rendered him an object of dislike to more than one of their most uncompromising opponents. His triumphs in the theatre led the worshippers of Corneille to regard him in the light of something like a personal foe. Last, but not least, he continued to make steady progress in royal favor, and the most coveted dignities in the way of state employment might be within his reach. Nor did all the ill-feeling excited against him fail to take a tangible form. The duchesse de Bouillon, niece of Mazarin, and Madame Deshoulières, the "tenth Muse," organized a cabal to lower his prestige as a dramatist, with the purpose of lessening his influence at court and of wounding his ever-susceptible vanity.

It was at this moment that Pradon's *Pirame et Thisbé* appeared. Might not the fiat go forth that the author had at one bound attained the first place among living dramatists, Corneille alone excepted? Numerically strong, the cabal eagerly acted upon the suggestion. In and out of season, at Versailles and in Paris, it was declared that the genius of Racine had been overshadowed by that of Pradon. *Pirame et Thisbé* accordingly obtained a factitious celebrity, and the shabby poet from Rouen found himself the hero of the hour.

Iphigénie.

Racine was weak enough to show that his persecutors had cut him to the quick, but ere long their satisfaction was qualified by a very different feeling. While the cry against him was at its height, his *Iphigénie* appeared at the Bourgogne, with Champmêlé as the young Greek virgin. He had recast Euripides' noble tragedy in a new mould, deepening the interest at the expense of the essential spirit of the original, and discarding the traditional catastrophe. Iphigenia must be sacrificed at the altar before the breezes required to bear the Greek fleet from Aulis to the Phrygian shore will set in, but at the eleventh hour it is found that another princess of the name is the victim intended by the gods. This *Iphigénie* was superior to anything Racine had yet achieved. Even *Andromaque* does not exhibit so powerful a command over the springs of human sensibility as that with which he portrays the resignation of Iphigenia to her seemingly inevitable fate, the terrible an-

guish of Clytemnestra, and the strife of contending feelings in the heart of Agamemnon. Mdlle. Champmêlé's acting, too, was worthy of the play. Boileau wrote a tribute of which the poet's mistress may well have been proud, and Louis XIV, fresh from yet another war, had the tragedy represented before him in the orangery at Versailles.

Corneille's Last Work.

In the autumn of 1673 the long career of Corneille as a dramatist came to a final close. Boileau had recently completed his *Art Poétique*, wherein he formulated the principles underlying his criticism, and which, even more than the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, was accepted as a general "profession of literary faith." In one chant he pointedly referred to "The Corneille both of the *Cid* and of *Horatius*." The aged dramatist seems to have been much pained by the distinction thus drawn. He could not bring himself to admit the great difference between his earlier and later work. "Am I not always Corneille?" he almost plaintively asked. In this spirit —this disinclination to admit that his intellectual energies were declining—he proceeded to write another tragedy for the Bourgogne. The hero on whom his choice fell was the Parthian warrior Surenas. By undertaking this task, he exposed himself to severe mortification. Neither players nor audience approved his work, and the veteran retired deeply disappointed.

Corneille continued to live at his old home, and his uncouth but impressive figure was still a familiar object in the streets of Paris and at first representations of

noteworthy plays. It was a comparatively sorrowful old age that awaited the man who had spread the fame of the French drama throughout Europe. His wife, the Marie de Lamperière of Richelieu days, was in her grave; his third son, the pride of his declining years, had lost his life at the head of a party of cavalry at the siege of Graves; his younger daughter, Marguérite, had taken the veil. He could not but recognize that his once splendid career was closing in gloom and misfortune, and his pension, almost the only means of support now left to him, was neither adequate to his wants nor regularly paid. Under these circumstances, as may be supposed, his brusqueness of manner and speech, which had so long withstood the influence of Parisian society, became more pronounced than ever. But life had not yet lost all its charms for the broken-spirited poet. He received more than one proof that the authority acquired by the new school of tragedy did not prevent the growth of his own fame. Six of his best plays were represented at Versailles by royal command. He conceived a tender interest in his sister's son, Bernard Le Bouvier de Fontenelle, then only in his eighteenth year, but already noted for his studious habits and his sobriety of demeanor. Above all, Thomas Corneille and his wife resided under the same roof; and lapse of time served only to strengthen the ties between them.

Racine's Phèdre.

Meantime Racine was advancing to a new triumph, won after a singular dramatic contest. "In a conversa-

tion at Madame de la Fayette's," says the abbé de Saint Pierre, "M. Racine contended that it was in the power of a great poet to make the darkest crimes appear more or less excusable—nay, to arouse compassion for the criminals themselves. Even Medea and Phædra, he thought, might become objects of pity rather than horror upon the stage. His hearers, however, were inclined to dissent from this view, if not to turn it into ridicule." In order to convince them of their error, as well as to measure his strength once more against Euripides, the dramatist took the fierce passion of Phædra for her stepson as the subject of a tragedy. His intention soon became known in the salons; and his enemies, recovering from the depressing effect of the success of *Iphigénie*, again assumed a hostile attitude toward him. They urged their friend Pradon to tear away any laurels that might still rest on the brow of Racine by writing a *Phèdre* in competition with him. The suggestion was complacently adopted, and the keenest interest was aroused in the result of the impending duel.

In less than three months the two *Phèdres* were in a presentable shape, and Racine's tragedy was played first on January 2, 1674. An unwelcome surprise fell upon the company as the curtain arose. The theatre was half deserted. The malicious cabal had bought up all the best seats, only to leave them unoccupied. The dreary aspect of the house threw a chill over the few who were present, and the performance concluded almost in silence. When, two days afterward, Pradon's *Phèdre* was brought forward at the Guénégaud, the scene was very different. The hall presented a most enlivening

appearance. The cabal had repaired thither in full force, and any expression of disgust on the part of Racine's partisans was promptly drowned in roars of applause. These tactics were pursued at each theatre for the first six representations, at a cost of no less than 15,000 livres.

The cabal soon had the mortification to find that they had gone to infinite trouble and expense without accomplishing their purpose. Pradon's tragedy became an object of general contempt, Racine's of more enthusiastic admiration than any of his previous works. In each instance the verdict of the play-goers has been endorsed by succeeding ages. In *Phèdre* the genius of Racine probably reached its culminating point.

The scene of the *Phèdre* is laid at Trezene in the Peloponnesus. Theseus, king of Athens, has long been absent from his home. Hippolytus, his son by Hippolyte, queen of the Amazons, being now grown up, declares his intention of seeking his father, but his tutor, Theramenes, tries to dissuade him. Theramenes had himself travelled through many countries in such a search, but in vain; and he suspects that Theseus may not desire to return. Further he tells the youth that his stepmother, Phædra, who had shown such dislike to him at first that Theseus had banished him for a while, has evidently relented; besides, she is ill of a malady, the cause of which she conceals. Hippolytus then reveals a new reason for his departure. He confesses that he is in love with Aricia, the daughter of Pallas. But her fifty brothers had attempted to drive Theseus from his throne and had all been slain.

Furthermore Theseus had prohibited Aricia from ever marrying, lest her children might avenge the deaths of their uncles. Hippolytus, feeling the embarrassment of his position, thinks he must depart, and Theramenes consents, but advises him to be constant in his love for Aricia.

Phædra then appears on the stage, bewailing her misfortune. She attributes it to the hatred which Venus bears to the sun-god Apollo for disclosing her amours with Mars. Phædra, being a descendant of Apollo, has been inspired by the implacable goddess with an overpowering love for her stepson. In vain has the unfortunate queen struggled against this unholy passion; but fate is against her, and her only relief can be in death. She thus addresses the Sun as her ancestor:

Noble and glorious author of an unhappy race, thou whose daughter it was my mother's boast to be, perhaps thou dost blush to witness me in my shame. O Sun, I come for the last time to look on thee.

Œnone, Phædra's old nurse, is with her, and bewails the wretchedness of her mistress; for three days she has taken no food, for three nights she has had no sleep. She thus seeks to learn the cause of the trouble:

By what remorse are you thus tortured? What crime has brought on you so severe affliction? Your hands are not stained with innocent blood.

Phædra.—**Thanks be to the gods, my hands are clean; would that my heart were as innocent!**

Œnone.—What dreadful purpose, then, has been in your heart?

Phæ.—I have told enough. Spare me the rest.

Œnone persists in demanding an explanation. Alleging her long and faithful services, she beseeches her mistress to have confidence in her, and with tears continues her searching inquiries. At last the probe touches the malignant germ.

Œnone.—Are you in love?

Phædra.—I have in me all its fire and fury.

Œn.—For whom?

Phæ.—You are about to hear the crown of horror. I love; but I tremble and shudder at his name.

Œn.—Who is he?

Phæ.—You know the son of the Amazon, the prince whom I have so long oppressed.

Œn.—Hippolytus! Great gods!

Phæ.—It is thou that hast pronounced his name!

Phædra proceeds to relate that when she became the wife of Theseus her happiness seemed secure. But Athens revealed to her the enemy of her peace, who filled her soul with trouble. She recognized Venus as her persecutor and sought to appease her by building and adorning a temple, in which she daily offered sacrifice and burned incense. But while thus engaged, her heart constantly turned to Hippolytus, until she made Theseus banish his son. For a time she was relieved, but when Theseus brought her to Trezene, she saw Hippolytus again, and all her torment returned.

She feels that the passion is not true love, but the malicious power of Venus within her. She hates herself; she is filled with horror at her crime. She has confessed, not being able to resist Œnone's tears, but she implores the aged nurse not to overwhelm her with reproach, seeing that death is near.

Panope, a servant, then comes to announce the death of Theseus. The people of Athens are in tumult on the question of their allegiance. Who shall reign, the son of Phædra, or Hippolytus, or Aricia, the heiress of Pallas? The nurse gives strange counsel. She tells Phædra that, since Theseus is dead, her love for Hippolytus is no longer criminal and may be avowed. Otherwise he may lead the rebels against her. But if she wins him to her side, they may unite in opposing Aricia.

In the second act Aricia appears with her confidante, Ismene. She has heard of the haughty and cold disposition of Hippolytus and wonders that he should ask to see her. But Ismene assures her that the reserved youth betrays his love for her by unmistakable signs. Aricia can scarcely be convinced; she recalls her misfortunes, the slaughter of her brothers and the hatred of Theseus. Yet she admits that his beauty and grace have touched her heart, and she is proud of his love thus unwittingly acquired. It is, indeed, a singular triumph to have conquered a man considered invulnerable. Hippolytus appears and assures Aricia that he will revoke the harsh decrees which his father had made against her. He goes further, and declares that her title to the sovereignty of Athens is superior to

his own, since Egeus, the father of Theseus, was but the adopted son of Pandion, whose title has lawfully descended to her. He even offers to support her cause against Phædra and make her queen of Attica. But this extreme and unexpected offer awakens distrust. Then Hippolytus declares his love, and her heart is softened. She accepts his offer to raise her to an unlooked-for dignity, yet assures him that she prizes more highly his affection.

Hippolytus is then summoned to meet Phædra, who exclaims to Œnone, as he approaches:

> There I see him!
> My blood forgets to flow, my tongue to speak
> What I am come to say.
>
> *Œnone.*— Think of your son,
> How all his hopes depend on you.
>
> *Phædra.*— I hear
> You leave us and in haste. I come to add
> My tears to your distress, and for a son
> Plead my alarm. No more has he a father,
> And at no distant day my son must witness
> My death. Already do a thousand foes
> Threaten his youth. You only can defend him.
> But in my secret heart remorse awakes,
> And fear lest I have shut your ears against
> His cries. I tremble lest your righteous anger
> Visit on him ere long the hatred earned
> By me, his mother.
>
> *Hippolytus.*— No such base resentment,
> Madam, is mine.
>
> *Phæ.*— I could not blame you, prince,
> If you should hate me. I have injured you:
> So much you know, but could not read my heart.
> T' incur your enmity has been mine aim:
> The selfsame borders could not hold us both;

In public and in private I declared
Myself your foe, and found no peace till seas
Parted us from each other. I forbade
Your very name to be pronounced before me.
And yet if punishment should be proportioned
To the offense, if only hatred draws
Your hatred, never woman merited
More pity, less deserved your enmity.

Hipp.—A mother jealous of her children's rights
Seldom forgives the offspring of a wife
Who reigned before her. Harassing suspicions
Are common sequels of a second marriage.
Of me would any other have been jealous
No less than you, perhaps more violent.

Phæ.—Ah, prince, how Heaven has from the general law
Made me exempt, be that same Heaven witness!
Far different is the trouble that devours me!

Hipp.—This is no time for self-reproaches, madam.
It may be that your husband still beholds
The light, and Heaven may grant him safe return,
In answer to our prayers. His guardian god
Is Neptune, ne'er by him invoked in vain.

Phæ.—He who has seen the mansions of the dead
Returns not thence. Since to those gloomy shores
Theseus is gone, 'tis vain to hope that Heaven
May send him back. Prince, there is no release
From Acheron's greedy maw. And yet, methinks,
He lives and breathes in you. I see him still
Before me, and to him I seem to speak;
My heart—
Oh, I am mad! Do what I will,
I cannot hide my passion.

Hipp.— Yes, I see
The strange effects of love. Theseus, though dead,
Seems present to your eyes, for in your soul
There burns a constant flame.

Phæ.— Ah, yes, for Theseus
I languish and I long; not as the Shades
Have seen him, of a thousand different forms

The fickle lover, and of Pluto's bride
The would-be ravisher, but faithful, proud
E'en to a slight disdain, with youthful charms
Attracting every heart, as gods are painted,
Or like yourself. He had your mien, your eyes,
Spoke and could blush like you, when to the isle
Of Crete, my childhood's home, he crossed the waves,
Worthy to win the love of Minos' daughters.
What were you doing then? Why did he gather
The flower of Greece, and leave Hippolytus?
Oh, why were you too young to have embarked
On board the ship that brought thy sire to Crete?
At your hands would the monster then have perished,
Despite the windings of his vast retreat.
To guide your doubtful steps within the maze
My sister would have armed you with the clue.
But, no, therein would Phædra have forestalled her.
Love would have first inspired me with the thought
And I it would have been whose timely aid
Had taught you all the labyrinth's crooked ways.
What anxious care a life so dear had cost me!
No thread had satisfied your lover's fears:
I would myself have wished to lead the way,
And share the peril you were bound to face;
Phædra with you would have explored the maze,
With you emerged in safety or have perished.

Hipp.—Gods! What is this I hear? Have you forgotten
That Theseus is my father and your husband?

Phæ.—Why should you fancy I have lost remembrance
Thereof, and am regardless of mine honor?

Hipp.—Forgive me, madam. With a blush I own
That I misconstructed words of innocence.
For very shame I cannot bear your sight
Longer. I go—

Phæ.— Ah! cruel prince, too well
You understood me. I have said enough
To save you from mistake. I love. But think not
That at the moment when I love you most
I do not feel my guilt; no weak compliance

Has fed the poison that infects my brain.
The ill-starred object of celestial vengeance,
I am not so detestable to you
As to myself. The gods will bear me witness,
Who have within my veins kindled this fire;
The gods, who take a barbarous delight
In leading a poor mortal's heart astray.
Do you yourself recall to mind the past:
'Twas not enough for me to fly—I chased you
Out of the country, wishing to appear
Inhuman, odious; to resist you better,
I sought to make you hate me. All in vain!
Hating me more, I loved you none the less:
New charms were lent to you by your misfortunes.
I have been drowned in tears, and scorched by fire;
Your own eyes might convince you of the truth,
If for one moment you could look at me.
What is't I say? Think you this vile confession
That I have made is what I sought to utter?
Not daring to betray a son for whom
I trembled, 'twas to beg you not to hate him
I came. Weak purpose of a heart too full
Of love for you to speak of aught besides!
Take your revenge, punish my odious passion;
Prove yourself worthy of your valiant sire,
And rid the world of an offensive monster!
Does Theseus's widow dare to love his son?
The frightful monster! Let her not escape you!
Here is my heart. This is the place to strike.
Already prompt to expiate its guilt,
I feel it leap impatiently to meet
Your arm. Quick, give 't.

Œn.— What, madam, will you do?
Just gods! But some one comes. Go, fly from shame;
You cannot 'scape if seen by any thus.

Enter Theramenes.

Theramenes.—Is that the form of Phædra that I see
Hurried away? What mean these signs of sorrow?
Where is your sword? Why are you pale, confused?

Hippolytus.—Friend, let us fly. I am, indeed, confounded.
With horror and astonishment extreme.
Phædra—but no; gods, let this dreadful secret
Remain forever buried in oblivion.

In the third act Phædra appears, refusing the honors that are offered to her. "Hide me, rather," she cries. "I have spoken what should never have been uttered." Her mind dwells on the terrible interview, the fatal confession. But prudent Œnone asks, Would it not be better to seek forgetfulness in nobler cares, to reign, and thus escape private distress? Phædra, with loftier view, exclaims:

I reign? I rule a State, when my feeble reason cannot govern myself?—when I have lost all self-control?—when I can scarce breathe under a shameful yoke?—when I am dying?

Œnone.—Then flee.

Phædra.—I cannot leave him.

Œn.—You dared to banish him once, yet you cannot avoid him now.

Phæ.—It is too late. He knows my madness. The boundaries of modesty are passed. I have unveiled my shame before my conqueror, and in spite of myself hope has stolen into my heart.

Œnone agrees that it is useless to attempt to move the heart of a proud, cruel son of a barbarian mother, but Phædra replies that though his mother was a Scythian, still she loved. Then she bids Œnone offer him the crown of Athens, saying, "Thy words will have better access to him than mine." When Œnone departs on this errand, Phædra appeals to Venus to subdue the

proud heart of Hippolytus. But in the midst of her prayers, Œnone returns with strange tidings.

Œnone.—Banish the thought of vain love. Madam, recall your lost strength. The king, who was thought dead, returns to your eyes. Theseus has come back. Theseus is here——

Phædra.—Just heaven! what do I hear? My husband comes, and his son with him. The witness of my terrible love will watch the welcome I give to his father—my heart still big with sighs he would not hear; my eyes wet with tears he heeded not. Think you that he, jealous of the honor of Theseus, will hide my shame from him? And even were he silent, it would be in vain. I know my treason, Œnone. I am not one of these bold women who wear an unblushing front, and are tranquil in the midst of crime. I know of what I am guilty. I remember all. These walls, these vaulted roofs, seem ready to utter speech, and await my husband to accuse me. Let me die! Let death deliver me from so many horrors. Is it such a great misfortune to cease to live? Death has no terrors for the unhappy. I fear only the bad name I shall leave behind me. My poor children, what an inheritance do I bequeath to them! The blood of Jupiter may swell their courage; but even with the just pride of that great descent, heavy is the burden of a mother's crime.

Œn.—Never was fear more just than yours; but why, then, expose them to such ignominy? Why accuse yourself? It will be said that Phædra, conscious of her own guilt, could not face her husband. Hippolytus is happy to find a witness for all his accusations in yourself. . . . . Yield not so easily the victory to him. Accuse him first of the charge he may bring against you. Who will contradict you? Everything is against him; his sword that happily he left in your hands, your present trouble, your past grief, your warnings to his father against him, his exile obtained by your efforts.

But when Phædra refuses to commit this new crime, Œnone takes the horrible task upon herself and assures her mistress that Theseus will do no more than banish

his son. Before she has finished her argument Theseus enters and rushes forward to embrace his wife, who exclaims:

> Stay, Theseus, profane not such holy transports. No longer do I deserve your fond greetings. You are offended. In your absence jealous fortune has not spared your wife. I am not worthy to be loved or to approach you. Henceforth I must study to hide my shame.

Phædra withdraws, and Theseus, bewildered, asks his son for an explanation. Hippolytus replies that she alone can explain, but declares that he can never see her more. The father inquires if he is going to leave him, and Hippolytus begs that he may be allowed to visit other countries and not pass his time in idleness.

Theseus, overwhelmed with amazement and grief, cries out in astonishment at the strange reception he has met at his own home from his wife and son. He demands that the unknown crime be revealed and the perpetrator punished.

In the fourth act Theseus is frantic at the story which Œnone has told, and when Hippolytus approaches, pours out his rage on the son's vile treachery and bids him flee, lest his death should stain his father's name. Then he invokes Neptune, who had long since promised his favor, to hear his first prayer and avenge him on his guilty son. Hippolytus listens with astonishment to the horrible charge, but is too generous to break his father's heart with a counter-accusation. He defends himself as well as he can without betraying the dreadful secret.

Hippolytus.—Examine my life: recall who I am. Great offenses always follow smaller faults. He who has once transgressed the bounds of law may some day violate the most holy ordinances. But vice, like virtue, has degrees. Never has timid innocence been seen to pass at once into wild license. One day cannot make of a good man a traitorous murderer nor an incestuous villain. I have not been false to my birth, nor to the chaste heroine at whose breast I was reared. No, my lord, I have always shown hatred of such vices. Such is the reputation Hippolytus has throughout Greece. I have pushed virtue to austerity. Day is not more pure than the depth of my heart. And yet it is said that Hippolytus, seized with a vile passion——

Theseus.—Thy very pride, coward, condemns thee! I see the meaning of thy hateful coldness. Phædra alone pleased thy immodest eyes. Thy heart disdained an innocent love.

Hipp.—No, my father, I have concealed it too long. This heart has not disdained a chaste love. I confess at your feet my real offense. I love; and I love, it is true, where you have forbidden me to cast my eyes. It is Aricia to whom my heart is subject. The daughter of Pallas has won your son. Her I adore; and my heart, rebellious to your commands, can only sigh and long for her.

Thes.—You love her? Heavens! But no! This artifice is too plain. You feign a crime to excuse yourself.

This verbal conflict between father and son becomes still more violent. Theseus will not believe the son's defense, and at last, wild with fury, drives him from his presence.

Phædra then appears, full of alarm and remorse, and entreats the father to be merciful. He assures her that his son is alive, and his punishment is left to Neptune. Then he informs her that Hippolytus had professed love for Aricia. This revelation has a powerful

effect on Phædra, and when she is left alone she bursts forth in heart-rending anguish. While she raves in distress, Œnone comes, thinking to save her mistress from some fatal catastrophe. But instead of bitter lamentations of remorse she hears only a mad outburst of jealousy. Phædra pictures to herself the meeting of the lovers, and is filled with rage at their happiness. She cries:

No! I cannot suffer a happiness which insults me. Œnone, have pity upon me. Aricia must die. My husband's wrath must be roused against her. Her crimes are worse than those of her brothers. What say I? My reason wanders. I jealous! And I ask Theseus to avenge me! My husband lives, and I yet love—but whom? What heart do I desire? At each word my very hair stands erect with horror. I breathe at once imposture and incest. My murderous hands long to plunge themselves in innocent blood. Wretch that I am! Yet I live, and affront the sight of that holy Sun from whom I am descended. My ancestor is father and lord of all the gods. Heaven, yea, all the universe is filled with my kindred. Where can I hide myself? If I go down into eternal darkness, my father Minos there holds the fatal urn, and has the fate of men in his austere hands. Ah! how that judge will shudder when he sees his daughter brought before him, obliged to acknowledge sins unheard-of even in hell! What wilt thou say, my father, to that horrible vision? I think I see the awful urn fall from thy hands. I think I see thee in thy despair seek out some new punishment, thou the executioner of thy child. It is the vengeance of a cruel god that has ruined thy race. In thy daughter's madness behold his wrath. Alas! I have gathered the fruit of the awful crime which disgraces me. Pursued by misfortune to my last sigh, I yield up in torment a life unsolaced by enjoyment.

Œnone strives to recall Phædra from despair. She bids her mistress dismiss her sorrow. Though she has been led astray by a fatal charm, she is not the only victim of love. Even the gods have submitted to its power.

But Phædra's rage is now turned against her confidante, whom she declares to be the cause of all her woe. She recalls the evil advice the nurse formerly gave, and its wicked and fearful results, and bids her begone to receive her just punishment from heaven.

Wretched Œnone, left alone, cries out, "I have done all, left all, only to serve her! I have my reward, and I deserve it well."

In the fifth act Aricia implores Hippolytus, in justice to himself, to reveal Phædra's guilt to Theseus; but his noble soul refuses to crush his father with this shame. He believes that Phædra will at last meet the ignominy she deserves. Then he asks Aricia to flee with him from this hateful spot, where even virtue is infected in the poisonous atmosphere. But the maiden shrinks from doing so while there is no lawful bond between them. Hippolytus suggests that there is a sacred temple outside of Trezene, where none dare swear falsely, for falsehood brings instant death. "Let us go there, and confirm an eternal love by a solemn oath. We will invoke the god to witness our vows, and pray to him to be our father."

As Aricia consents, Theseus is seen approaching, and she hurries Hippolytus away. When Theseus inquires what his son was doing there, she answers that he was bidding her farewell and swore eternal love. But

Theseus tells her not to believe him. Then she bursts forth in indignant defense of her lover, and protests against his being sacrificed to his malignant accusers. Theseus insists that he has sure witnesses of his son's guilt. Again protesting against his decision, Aricia leaves, fearing she may be forced to disclose the horrible crime.

Theseus, again bewildered with the mystery, calls for Œnone, but a woman comes to report that Œnone has drowned herself, and that Phædra is hopelessly insane. Still seeking explanation of the dreadful condition, Theseus orders his son to be called. He prays that Neptune will stay his hand and spare his son. But it is too late. Theramenes enters to relate the tragic fate of the guiltless youth. Hippolytus, in his chariot, was driving his favorite horses out of the city when they were frightened by the approach of a huge dragon from the sea. As the wave washed the monster ashore, Hippolytus wounded it with a javelin, but the maddened beast breathed forth flames, smoke and blood. The horses became unmanageable and dashed wildly over the rocks. Hippolytus fell, entangled in the reins, and was dragged swiftly along by the panic-stricken steeds. Theramenes had seen the catastrophe and hastened after them. He was able to receive the last words of the dying youth:

Heaven has robbed me of an innocent life. When I am gone, look thou to sad Aricia. Dear friend, if my father be ever undeceived, if he weep over the fate of his son so falsely accused, tell him for my sake to treat his captive kindly, and to restore her——

But the sentence was left unfinished.

While Theseus listens to the harrowing report, Phædra enters, and he turns upon her violently. "You triumph!" he cries, "and my son is slain." But Phædra has already resolved to confess all.

Phædra.—My time is short. Listen to me, Theseus. It was I who looked with profane eyes upon your chaste and virtuous son. Heaven put a fatal passion into my bosom. The hateful Œnone carried out its plan. Fearing that Hippolytus should betray to you a love which filled him with horror, she, the traitress, abusing my weakness, hastened to accuse him first. She is punished. Flying from my anger, she has found under the waves a fate more merciful than she deserved. Already my life should have been cut short by the sword. But that would have left a doubt on slandered virtue. That you may know my remorse, I have chosen to die more slowly. I have infused into my burning veins a poison which Medea brought from Athens. The venom has now reached my heart and thrown there an unknown chill. Already I see, as through a cloud, heaven and the husband whom my presence insults. Death, withdrawing the light from my eyes, gives back to the day which they defiled all its purity.

It is only in the plays of Shakespeare and the graver comedies of Molière that we find any character worthy of comparison with *Phèdre.* In the Greek and Roman tragedies on the same subject, where the death of Hippolytus is treated as the chief source of interest, the miserable wife of Theseus engages little or no sympathy. Her passion for the young warrior is essentially material, and in covering him with infamy she acts of her own free will. Racine represents her in a finer light—as a

woman struggling with all the energy of a high and noble nature against the illicit yearnings instilled into her by Aphrodite, as loathing herself with increasing intensity as she sinks lower and lower into the abyss of guilt, as refusing to accuse Hippolytus until she has been craftily goaded to frenzy by the nurse, and finally as a prey to bitter though unavailing remorse. It was a great and original conception, worked out with all the force that could be imparted to it by analytic insight, imaginative art and beauty of diction. Inferior to Euripides in *Iphigénie*, Racine here surpassed his model, besides furnishing the French stage with the finest tragic character, though not the finest play, yet seen upon it.

Thomas Corneille's Don Juan.

Pradon's *Phèdre* was followed at the Guénégaud by Thomas Corneille's *Don Juan*, borrowed entirely from Molière's play, and very much marred in the borrowing. At the instance of Armande, Corneille had turned the nervous and flexible prose of the original into more or less stilted verse, at the same time deferring to overnice susceptibilities so far as to eliminate or soften many passages essential to the really blameless purpose of the author; for Molière's *Don Juan* is purity itself when compared with other versions of this time-worn, but ever popular, legend, with barely a trace of the voluptuous tone, the universal love-making, which Byron attributes to his all-conquering but somewhat effeminate hero. It is indeed grievous to see that the posthumous fame of Molière should thus have suffered at the hands

of the woman who owed to him fortune, social distinction and an illustrious name.

Death of Pradon.

In 1677 a new tragedy by Pradon, entitled *Electre,* sealed his doom. The cabal, alive to the ridiculous nature of the position in which they had placed themselves, abandoned the author to his fate, and ceased to show any desire either for his plays or his society. Deprived of their support, *Electre* failed most ingloriously; it was hissed off the stage—the first time such a mark of disapproval had been used by a French audience. In the middle of the pit, with his face half buried in a cloak, was the unhappy author himself, who, failing to understand why his *Phèdre* had produced so poor an effect, had gone thither with a friend to hear the criticisms passed upon his work. When the hisses came he stamped his foot with rage. "Monsieur," said his companion, "you may be recognized; do not let it be said that you are crushed by this reverse; hiss like the others." Pradon, perceiving that the doom of the play was sealed, grimly followed the advice. Near him stood a mousquetaire on duty in the theatre. "What is the meaning of this noise?" the latter angrily asked him; "the piece is a fine one, and the author is a man of consideration at court." "I shall hiss as long as I like," was the reply. The mousquetaire, who was an ill-tempered man, tore off the poet's peruke, doubled it up, and hurled it to the side of the theatre. Pradon fiercely flew at him, and in a few moments, bleeding

from a wound he had received in the scuffle, was hustled into the street.

Corneille Offends Racine.

In the course of a meeting at the Academy, Pierre Corneille highly commended Boursault's tragedy of *Germanicus,* even to the extent of saying that it wanted only the name of Racine, in whose hearing he spoke, to be deemed a great work. Boursault dwells upon this utterance with amusing complacency. To him, he said, it was extremely gratifying to find a man so famous as M. Corneille "pronouncing *Germanicus* to be worthy of so great a name as that of Racine." The fact is that Corneille had simply indulged in a little pleasantry at the expense of his illustrious rival, as he well knew that *Germanicus* was at best an indifferent work. But Racine, mistaking Corneille's intention, made some bitter and sarcastic retort; high words followed between the authors of the *Cid* and *Phèdre*, and the coolness which had before existed between them was so far increased that they never spoke to each other again. Racine could well afford to laugh at what was clearly nothing more than a little raillery, but his amour propre was too deep and sensitive to be under the control of his better judgment.

Retirement of Racine.

Before the end of 1677, at the early age of thirty-eight, the too sensitive Racine, weary of the struggle with bitter foes, in spite of his substantial vic-

tories, definitely abandoned the profession which he adopted with so much ardor in his youth. Soon after the production of *Phèdre*, thanks to the mediation of Boileau, he effected a reconciliation with the theatre-hating Port Royalists, who in a short time obtained a complete ascendancy over him. Soon he married Catharine de Romanet, a lady of birth and a little fortune, described as "amiable, but religious to the point of bigotry." It is said that she never knew her husband's plays except by their names—plays which, whatever may be thought of his personal character, were defaced by no unholy or impure thoughts, could not but strengthen every worthy resolution in their hearers, and had already been accepted by the world as among the noblest efforts of genius. In his new-born pietism, with such a woman by his side, the poet naturally began to ask himself whether he had not committed a crime in the eyes of God by working for the theatre.

By aid of Mme. de Montespan, whose good opinion he had been careful to win, he became joint historiographer royal with Boileau, and the task that now awaited him was arduous and delicate enough to claim undivided attention. Rumor had long credited him with an intention to write an *Alceste*, but it was now made known that henceforward he would be prevented by religious scruples from treating that or any other subject for the stage. Many of his contemporaries questioned the realty of this conversion, seeing that he continued to be an obsequious courtier, to participate freely in the frivolities of Versailles, and to exercise his caustic wit in verses against even needy gleaners in the

field where he had reaped so abundant a harvest. "I have been told," Boileau once remarked, "that Racine is my superior as a satirist; he certainly surpasses me in bitterness." On the other hand, this voluntary abandonment of the stage by a man like the author of *Phèdre*—hungry for distinction, proud of success and still in the full possession of his genius—is not to be adequately explained by anything short of fanaticism, though his conduct was often at variance with the spirit and letter of the faith he now held in such profound and self-sacrificing reverence.

II.

Formation of the Théâtre Français

Racine's abdication of the throne of dramatic poetry was almost coincident with the sweeping changes in theatrical affairs introduced by the formation of what is known as the Théâtre Français or Comédie Française. Louis XIV, it must be premised, regarded state aid as essential to the interests of literature and art, and was determined that every means of influencing the opinion of his subjects should be under the immediate control of the court. In the summer of 1680, mindful of the power acquired by the drama, he suddenly applied these ideas to the theatre as it existed in Paris. He issued an order to the effect that the two troupes should form themselves into one, take up their quarters at the playhouse in the Rue Mazarine, and be granted a subvention of 12,000 livres a year. No other actors would be allowed to ply their vocation in the town or faubourgs without his majesty's express permission, but the Italian comedians, who had played alternately with Molière's company at the Guénégaud since 1673, would migrate to the Bourgogne. In the lettre de cachet, signed at Versailles by Louis himself, with Col-

bert and Scelle as witnesses, we are told that the object of the union of the two troupes was to "render the representations of comedies more complete, and to afford the players the means of perfecting themselves in their art."

Fontenelle.

Corneille's nephew, Fontenelle, cured of any taste he may have had for the law by the failure of the first case placed in his hands, resolved to trouble himself with nothing but literature; and a tragedy from his pen, entitled *Aspar*, was now accepted. Devisé, prompted by Thomas Corneille, sounded the praises of the new poet in no uncertain voice. "Inheriting," he said, "the genius of his uncle, the author of the *Cid* and *Cinna*, M. de Fontenelle would at once leave all the younger dramatists behind, if not become the monarch of the scene." The consequences of this puff need hardly be stated. Extravagant expectations as to the quality of *Aspar* were aroused, and the play was so far beneath them as to become an object of popular derision. Racine, imagining that Devisé's article was an elaborate sneer at himself, swelled the chorus against the inoffensive author by means of a bitter epigram. In the house of a veteran actor, we are told, a controversy arose as to which dramatist had first caused an audience to hiss. Some thought Boyer was the man; others wished to lay a wager on Pradon. Eventually the host recited the epigram which declared Fontenelle to be the offender. The unenviable distinction had really been acquired, as we have seen, by Pradon, as a well-deserved

rebuke for inflicting his *Electre* on the play-going public in competition with Racine.

La Comète.

Unsuccessful as a tragic dramatist, Fontenelle now essayed his powers in comedy. *La Comète*, a small piece in prose, was from his pen, although produced under the name of Devisé. The plot had reference to the comet of the year 1677, which, by the swiftness of its progress and the enormous train of light it threw off, had created a feeling of awe and terror. An astrologer, believing that the celestial wanderer exercises a malign influence, postpones the marriage of his daughter until it has disappeared, but while he is observing it from a neighboring house with the comtesse de Soustignan, the lovers elope. *La Comète* was not very diverting except in one scene, and then only by reason of the fact that in an explanation of Descartes' system the author betrayed the most curious ignorance thereof. Fontenelle was so mortified by his second failure that he never wrote another play. Instead, he devoted himself to the study of the exact sciences, and his pleasant *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes*, published a few years afterward, was the result.

Campistron.

Among the minor dramatists who followed Racine was Jean Galbert Campistron, a young man from Toulouse, where his family, one entitled to call

itself noble—had been established since the middle of the previous century. From boyhood he had aspired to distinction as a poet, and his father, a procureur-général, had sent him to Paris in the hope that a little intercourse with the world would serve to dispel such idle notions. This step, it need hardly be said, had the reverse effect. Jean Galbert became an inveterate play-goer, arrived at the conclusion that the drama was at once the best and pleasantest form of poetical expression, and at last, aided by Racine, whose acquaintance he chanced to make, wrote a *Virginie*. In due time it was taken to the theatre in the Rue Mazarine, where it was played with fair success. "I was so young when I composed *Virginie*," he remarked some years afterward, "that I am always astonished I should have had the temerity to begin and the power and happiness to finish it. Its success, though indifferent, did not allow me to despair." Here, as in other instances, the poet hardly did himself justice. *Virginie* enjoyed a moderate run, and of this it was by no means undeserving. The impressive Roman story is artistically told, and if the versification is over long, the defect is to a large extent redeemed by interesting situations and well-drawn characters.

In appearance Campistron hardly fulfilled the popular idea of a poet; his figure was thick-set, his face flat and round and his nose remarkably broad. It is said that he had an invincible repugnance to letter-writing, and, probably in order to save himself unnecessary trouble on this head, made his handwriting almost undecipherable. He seems to have been one

of the best-disposed of men and was always grateful for favors received. Mindful, for example, of his obligations to Raisin, in whose house he now lived, he resolved that all the heroines in his dramas should be played by that actor's wife, and even the advantage of having some of them in the hands of Champmêlé could not induce him to alter his mind on this point.

Death of the Queen.

The favor with which Corneille's *Andromède* had just been received now induced the players to revive his *Toisson d'Or*. The original prologue having reference to the king's marriage, they asked Lachapelle to furnish them with one more suitable to the year of grace 1683, and, on his doing so, instructed an actor to present him at his residence with fifteen louis d'or in return for his trouble. By a singular coincidence, just after Lachapelle's prologue had been spoken for the tenth time, a mounted messenger arrived with news of the queen's death. The performance was accordingly stopped, the money taken at the doors returned and the theatre closed until further orders. The period of public mourning over, the company reopened, by the king's permission, with *Rodogune and the Comtesse d'Escarbagnas.*

Louis XIV Marries Scarron's Widow.

Louis XIV did not long remain a widower. At midnight, in one of his cabinets at Versailles, a very few weeks after the death of his wife, he was married to

the widow of Scarron, who some years previously had become governess to the children of Madame de Montespan, and, under the title of the marquise de Maintenon, had won his esteem and regard without making any sacrifices inconsistent with her self-respect. The event was kept a profound secret, but was generally assumed to have taken place. The influence which Madame de Maintenon exercised over her royal husband was generally for good. The beautiful and lively Françoise d'Aubigné, of times gone by, had become austerely devout, and under her sway the court all but relieved itself from the taint of licentiousness. Her unworldliness, however, seems in one or two instances to have carried her a little too far, and from the hour of her ascendancy the drama was not so largely honored as it had been.

Novelties at the Théâtre Français.

Boursault now made another essay in tragedy, courageously selecting the story of the ill-starred Mary, queen of Scots, for his theme. The piece did not succeed, but at the same time the author had reason to congratulate himself upon having written it; for the duc d'Aignan, to whom it was dedicated, presented him with a hundred louis. The abbé Genest's *Pénélope*, though unfavorably received, was so full of beauties of detail that the verdict at first pronounced upon it was eventually reversed, and the author, who had intended to suppress it, then laid it at the feet of the duchesse d'Orleans. The players next produced Campistron's

second tragedy, *Arminius*, the author at the same time printing it with a dedicatory epistle to the dreaded duchesse de Bouillon. In arrangement and writing the piece is excellent, but the characters are far from clearly drawn. Flattered by the homage rendered to her by the author, the duchesse became one of the most fervent admirers of his stage work—and his *Arminius* proved more successful than its merits deserved. Campistron also wrote for Mdlle. Raisin his comedy *L'Amante Amant*, in which, as in Montfleuri's piece, the heroine appears as a gay cavalier. Brightly written—though so indelicate that the author afterward disavowed it—and strengthened by the spirited acting of Mdlle. Raisin, now, of course, on her mettle, *L'Amante Amant* took the fancy of the town. Mdlle. Guiot, hitherto regarded as a mediocre player, also did good service here. Brécourt's *Timon* was an undramatic dramatization of Lucien's dialogue, but was represented seventeen times.

Baron, the most accomplished actor of the reign of Louis XIV, merits notice. Idolized by the public, caressed by society and studied by most of his fellow-men, clergymen not excepted, as a model of bearing and elocution, he conceived a somewhat extravagant idea of the importance of his art, and an absurdly extravagant idea of his own talents. His self-assertion was loud and persistent enough to pass into a proverb, and ridiculous enough to set all Paris laughing. "Since the dawn of history," he said, "the world has seen only two great actors—Roscius and myself. Every century has its Cæsar; two thousand years are required to produce a Baron." Egregious as his vanity was, however, it did

not hinder him from adopting a good suggestion. In *Mithridate*, before replying to the excuses of the two princes, it was long his custom to assume an air of deep reflection. One of his comrades held this to be misplaced. "Mithridates," said the critic, "ought to reply to his sons on appearing with them, for such a man as he was would perceive the true aspect of the most important affairs in a moment." Baron, struck by the force of the argument, promptly made the needed change in his performance—a proof that the artist was stronger than the man.

But even as a man Baron possessed many claims to our respect. He had the spirit to resent any insolence to which a member of the company might be subjected behind the scenes by the coxcombs assembled there; he was also open-handed to a fault and he gave so unostentatiously that none but the recipients were aware of his gifts. In the salons, continuing the work begun by others, he did much to soften the stigma which the Church cast upon the histrionic profession; his manners were indicative of good breeding, and the education given him by Molière, of whom he spoke with filial tenderness and reverence, had more than atoned for the neglect he suffered in his orphan boyhood. He found personal friends in men by no means disposed to make their friendship cheap.

Death of Corneille.

It was just as Baron reached the zenith of his power that the venerable figure of Corneille disappeared from

the theatre of life. In the records of the poet's closing days we have a striking instance of the contrast often presented between the public position and private circumstances of the man of genius. His fame, thanks in some measure to the controversy provoked by the appearance of Racine, now stood at a higher point than it had previously reached. By all classes of his fellow-countrymen, from the king down to the workman, it was felt that he more than merited the epithet of "le grand." He could not stir out of his dingy abode in the Rue d'Argenteuil without receiving marks of respect from persons with whom he had never exchanged a word, but who numbered the *Cid* and *Polyeucte* among the dearest treasures of their memories. One evening, having unexpectedly appeared in a box at the theatre, after a long absence, he became the object of a remarkable demonstration; the players interrupted the performance to pay him homage and the whole of the audience, which included Condé and other illustrious personages, rose and warmly cheered him.

Yet the recipient of these almost royal honors was then in extreme destitution. His pension from the court, at no time regularly paid, had been temporarily stopped, and only the precarious earnings of his brother, as a playwriter and journalist, stood between him and absolute starvation. His inveterate pride enabled the aged poet to disguise his misery as much as possible. Presently, however, the truth came to the knowledge of Boileau, who at once brought it to the notice of the king. "Sire," he said, possibly with a vein of sarcasm beneath the elaborate deference of his manner, "a little

bread for the great Corneille! Let him have my pension; I should be ashamed to receive it if he were in want." His majesty sent Corneille two hundred louis, at the same time ordering that the suspended pension should not be withheld in future. The largess came too late. Forty-eight hours afterward the author of the *Cid*, enfeebled in mind and body by age and privation, passed away in the presence of all the surviving members of his family, by whom his remains were laid at rest in the church of St. Roch.

Racine's Tribute to Corneille.

The finest tribute laid upon the grave of the illustrious dramatist came from his rival. Corneille was succeeded at the Academy by his brother; and Racine, anxious to soften the reproach he had brought upon himself by his insolence toward Corneille when living, appeared at the reception of the new member to do honor to the dead. "In what state," he said in the course of his address, which had previously been read and approved by the king, "was the French stage when Corneille began to work? It was without order, regularity, taste, morals, characters or any perception of true dramatic beauty. Most of its subjects were extravagant enough to be destitute of all probability; its language depended for effect chiefly upon miserable quibbling. Every rule of art, every rule of self-respect and decency, was constantly violated. In this infancy, or rather chaos, of dramatic poetry in France, Corneille, after endeavoring for some time to strike into a higher

path, was impelled by an exceptional genius to bring reason upon the scene—reason accompanied by all the majesty and embellishments of which our language is susceptible—and combined the semblance of truth with the marvellous. He went far ahead of his rivals, the majority of whom, no longer daring to struggle with him for the prize, vainly tried to depreciate the merit they were unable to equal. Where, indeed, can we find a poet uniting in himself so many rare gifts, such art, force, judgment and imagination? How noble his subjects; how energetic his pictures of passion; how grave his sentiments; how dignified and varied his characters! His heroes are always what they ought to be, always uniform with themselves, always differing from one another. Magnificent in expression, he could yet descend at will to the most simple naïvetés of comedy, where he was likewise inimitable. Lastly—and this was his most distinctive characteristic—he had a certain power and elevation which lifted us out of ourselves, even to the extent of blinding us to his faults, if faults he can be said to have had. He was born for the glory of his country; his masterpieces will ever be on the lips of men. He is to be compared, I do not say with the tragic poetry of ancient Rome, since Rome was confessedly not very fortunate in this branch of letters, but with Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, who were no less honored by the Athenians than Themistocles, Pericles and Alcibiades." In some respects, perhaps, the orator went a little too far in his praise; but with a few slight exceptions this eulogy might well have been inscribed in letters of gold upon the simple slab which marked his

resting-place; for to Corneille no such monument was raised as was at all in keeping with his fame.

Review of Corneille's Drama.

Corneille is justly revered as the first, and in some respects the greatest, of the great masters of French tragedy, whatever may have been unsound in his theories or defective in his practice. The attempts of his predecessors had been without life, because they lacked really tragic characters and the play of really tragic passions, while their style had been either pedantically imitative or a medley of plagiarisms. He conquered tragedy at once for the national theatre and for the national literature, and this not by a long tentative process of production, but by a few masterpieces; for in his many later tragedies he never proved fully equal to himself. French tragedy, of which the great age begins with the *Cid, Horace, Cinna* and *Polyeucte,* was not, whatever it professed to be, a copy of the classical tragedy of the Greeks or Romans; nor was it an imitation of the Italian imitations of these; nor, though in his later tragedies Corneille, after the fashion of the Spaniards, depended less and less upon characters and more and more upon situations, were the forms of the Spanish drama able to assert their dominion over the French tragic stage. The mould of French tragedy was cast by Corneille, but the creative power of his genius was unable to fill it with more than a few examples. His range of passions and characters was limited; he preferred, he said, the reproach of having made his women

too heroic to that of having made his men effeminate. His actions inclined too much to the exhibition of conflicts political rather than broadly ethical in their significance. The defects of his style are of less moment; but in this, as in other respects, he cannot, with all his strength and brilliancy, be ranked among those rarest of artists who are at once the example and the despair of their successors.

A Comedy by Baron.

Dissatisfied with the characters devised for him by contemporary dramatists, and not content, perhaps, with the laurels he had won as an actor, Baron himself began to write. His first essay was a prose comedy in three acts, *Le Rendezvous des Tuileries, ou Le Coquet Trompé.* If, contrary to his expectations, the world declined to accept him as a Molière in embryo, or even as a writer of more than ordinary talents, his new ambition was not inexcusable. Strong intelligence and long experience on the stage had made him acquainted with the chief principles of dramatic effect, and his intercourse with the lively society of his day furnished him with hints by which he knew how to profit. The *Rendezvous des Tuileries* merely shows a young lady proving the infidelity of a nominal lover by means of a pretended appointment—certainly no very novel or interesting story. On the other hand, the dialogue is not without animation, and the leading figures, notably those of a coquette and a pert waiting-maid, have a degree of freshness hardly to be looked for in the treat-

ment of well-worn materials. In his prologue the author gives us a few satirical sketches of the Comédiens du Roi, not sparing himself, and of the coxcombs who, ensconced on the stage, hissed or applauded a play, as the shallowest caprice might dictate.

New Regulations.

The position of the players at the Théâtre Français was strengthened by new regulations issued at this time. The king, more alive than ever to the power of the drama as a means of influencing public opinion, assigned the care of the two theatres in Paris to the dauphiness, ostensibly "pour faire plaisir a cette princesse," but really to bring them as much as possible under the domination of the court. Madame la Dauphine, "after making due inquiries," drew up a series of regulations in regard to the Comédie. The troupe was always to consist of a number of players sufficient to adequately play a piece in the royal palaces when his majesty wished to be so amused. They would receive their orders from the first gentleman of the chamber through the medium of the intendents and controleurs. The contract of 1681 should be observed to the letter, any difficulties arising under it being inquired into and reported by the aforesaid intendent and controleur to the first gentleman, who would settle the matter as he thought right. The pensions awarded to retired players were to be paid in full. The casts of pieces were to continue as arranged by the authors, but for the good of the service and the convenience of

the troupe all the characters should be understudied by those who, in the estimation of the company as a body, should be the most capable of filling them. The characters of new plays should also be distributed by the authors and doubled. In order to prevent disputes, no piece was to be played without the consent of the whole company, and in order to preserve harmony in the theatre all quarrels in business among the players should be adjusted by the first gentleman as he thought fit. Such, stripped of their verbiage, were the new regulations.

Persecution of Protestants.

Unfortunately for the Comédie, the edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, whereby the players were to lose a considerable portion of their regular audience. It was at the instance of the Church in France that Louis XIV crowned a long series of regulations against the Protestants by revoking the edict under which they had enjoyed freedom of worship. Madame de Maintenon might have saved him from so dire a mistake, but a fear lest any intervention on her part should be ascribed to a lingering sympathy with her former creed induced her to look on in silence. It was ordered that all Huguenot places of worship should be destroyed; that all unconverted ministers found in France, fifteen days after the date of the measure, should be sent to the galleys, and that the property of those who persisted in the exercise of their religion should be confiscated. Nor was the king content with merely issuing the decree. He sent troops in nearly all directions to

enforce it. In every quarter of Paris were heard accounts of children being dragged from their parents and shut up in convents, of girls being ravished by the brutal soldiery, of refractory Huguenots being stripped of their possessions, sent to the stake or the wheel or murdered outright.

Acis et Galatée.

Campistron now became more than usually conspicuous. The libertine duc de Vendôme had invited the dauphin to Anet, and was anxious that a new opera should be played there during the royal visit. He accordingly enlisted the services of Lulli, and, finding that Quinault had laid down the pen forever, besought Racine to write the libretto. The poet excused himself, at the same time suggesting that the task should be allotted to Campistron. The suggestion was adopted; the young dramatist hastened to confer with Lulli, and the result of their joint labors was the musical pastoral of *Acis et Galatée*—the last work, as it proved, of the maestro. The fête, which cost the duke 100,000 livres —a sum he could ill spare—had all possible success. The graceful château erected by Diane de Poitiers in place of the old manor-house of the De Brézes was the scene, during a whole week, of an almost incessant round of gayety. Now a hunting party was issuing from the gateway; now the grounds were alive with fair dames and gallant cavaliers; now high wassail was held in the banqueting hall. The company was decidedly of a mixed character. M. le duc and his titled guests were surrounded by men of letters, musicians,

ACIS AND GALATEA

After an original painting by L. Thiersch

We have here the scene where Galatea, daughter of Thetis and Amphitrite, plays with and deludes her rustic lover of the shore, the one-eyed Polyphemus, fooling him as completely as did Ulysses—the one by love, the other by wine.

and the singers and dancers brought from Paris to give due effect to the opera. Distinguished poets recited unpublished verses at every repast. The witty abbé de Chaulieu sang the praises of inconstancy; Lafare, in reply to the princesse de Conti, maintained that men of that time loved more and better than those of old. The verses were by no means too delicate, but the presence of the dauphiness and other ladies of high station saved the fête from degenerating into an orgie. Says Lafare in his *Mémoires*, "As le grand prieur, the abbé Chaulieu, and myself had each a mistress at the opera, ill-natured people said that we had induced M. de Vendôme to spend 100,000 livres to divert ourselves and our damsels; but we had higher objects than that." We may admit the latter statement without dismissing the accusation which called it forth. The duke and his companions were not merely desirous that a work of musical and poetical genius should be produced on the occasion, but that they attached great importance to the new pastoral there is no doubt. In no respect could *Acis et Galatée* have fallen below their just expectations, and the still youthful author of the verse was rewarded with thanks and a hundred louis.

Phraate.

Campistron now took up his residence at Anet, and there, surrounded by souvenirs of the illicit loves of Henri II and Diane de Poitiers—souvenirs not excluded from the chapel itself—completed a tragedy derived from Parthian history, which presently appeared at the

Comédie Française under the title of *Phraate*. No little sensation was created by some of the passages, in which the tyranny and vices and prodigality of kings were assailed with great spirit. The audience, recovering from its surprise, immediately divided into hostile sections. Those who did not approve all the proceedings of the Grand Monarque were naturally delighted; others declared that the audacious author deserved to be sent to the bastille. The players were for retaining the piece in the bills; but Campistron, terrified by the storm he had raised, induced the dauphiness to order the play withdrawn, at the same time assuring her that he had simply complied with the exigencies of his subject, and that nothing had been further from his thoughts than an attack, directly or indirectly, upon the prince who had done so much for France. How far the obnoxious passages were intentional it is impossible to say, as the author had the wit to destroy the manuscript as soon as possible. The duc de Vendôme, who had made him his secretary, instead of dispensing with his services, seemed from this time to hold him in higher regard than before. Even Campistron's unconquerable repugnance to letter-writing did not qualify this feeling. "Don't let me disturb you," the duke good-naturedly remarked to the dramatist, surprising him in the act of burning a basketful of letters: "I see you are occupied in making replies."

Among the novelties of the season was a *Regulus* by Pradon, which was by no means without merit, especially in the scene where the Roman general returns to Carthage to die.

III.

Revival of the Religious Drama.

The pietism of the court of Louis XIV under the regulation of Madame de Maintenon was of direct service to dramatic literature. She had established at Saint Cyr a school in which poor but well-born girls might be educated. This education was in the main of a religious character, but as a means of purifying their tastes and strengthening their judgment, the pupils were allowed to perform in strictly moral plays. By no one was this concession hailed with greater satisfaction than the preceptress, Madame de Brinon. Possessed with a mania for writing and speech-making, she preached to and wrote comedies for the girls committed to her care. "I am disposed to think," said Madame de Maintenon, after one of the performances, "that we might have something from Corneille and Racine—if there is not too much love in it." The preceptress obediently took the hint, and *Cinna* and *Andromaque* were played. In choosing the latter tragedy, perhaps Madame de Brinon had her own interests in view. Irreproachable as was the care with which the pupils were trained, they would be daughters of Eve enough

to give a most fervid expression to all the tender passages in the play, and it was probable that Madame de Maintenon would deem it prudent to return to the discarded pieces. This hope was not realized, at least for some time. The pupils, it is true, acted *Andromaque* with a degree of earnestness which inspired the queen with the liveliest fears as to their future, but instead of having Madame de Brinon's efforts played again, she requested Racine to write for the Maison de Saint Cyr "a dramatic poem, moral or historic, from which love should be entirely excluded."

Racine's Esther.

Racine, who continued to reside in Paris, now playing the courtier, now discharging his duties as historiographer royal, now writing a pungent epigram at his enemies and aspiring dramatists, but more frequently than all engaged in religious meditations and observances, was not a little troubled by this order. He was about fifty years of age, and might easily diminish the splendor of the reputation he had won at the Bourgogne. "What would his enemies say if, after having triumphed in the secular theatre, he suffered a reverse in a theatre consecrated to piety?" His first impulse was to excuse himself, and Boileau, often disposed to fall in with his mood, advised him to do so. But on further reflection he determined to comply with the request, partly in order to avoid giving offense to one who, for anything he knew to the contrary, was the king's mistress, and partly because he saw in the story

of Esther a subject at once worthy of his powers and suited to the purpose in view. Boileau thereupon counselled him to accept, and in a short time *Esther* was completed. The poet's hand, it was clear, had not lost its cunning. The tragedy is excellent in both form and substance, and must ever hold a prominent place among his works. He reverently adhered to the original, as far as the story is concerned, bore Herodotus in mind to good purpose in delineating the character of Assuérus and introduced the chorus with a skill almost worthy of the Greek dramatists. It must be specially observed that, while restricting the action to the palace, he changed the decoration with each act, not in the hope that such an infringement of the rule as to unity of place would find imitators, but simply to render the piece more acceptable to the young players for whom it was created.

Racine was requested by Madame de Maintenon to prepare the pupils of Saint Cyr for their task—a dangerous undertaking for so impressionable a man, since most of them were personally attractive. One pupil, the Madame de Caylus of after-years, having testified an ardent desire to be included in the cast, Racine wrote for her the prologue, which is spoken by Piety. It may be presumed that he fulfilled his duties con amore. *Esther* was played for the first time during the carnival of 1689, the audience comprising the king, Madame de Maintenon, Louvois and many others of the French court. The success of the drama was instant and decisive, partly on account of its poetical beauty, but chiefly, no doubt, because every one perceived in

it an allegory flattering to the powers that were. The king was to be seen in Ahasuerus, the humbled Madame de Montespan in Vashti, the triumphant Madame de Maintenon in Esther, and the relentless Louvois in Haman. In regard to Esther, it must be said, the parallel was far from complete. Esther saved her nation; Madame de Maintenon, who had been brought up as a Huguenot, allowed the God of her fathers to be proscribed. This distinction was not suggested in the play, though it is remarkable that, only four years after the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and at a time when a man who suggested that a king could be misled was deemed guilty of "culpable temerity," Racine should have caused such words as, "The king, too credulous, has signed this edict," to be recited in the hearing of the authors of that measure. But if the king and his wife felt any resentment it was carefully disguised. "His majesty and all the court," writes Madame de Sévigné, who was present, "are charmed with Esther. Racine has surpassed himself"—and this seems to have echoed the general opinion. "He now loves God as he used to love his mistresses. He is for sacred what he was for profane themes; all is beautiful, all is great, all is written with dignity." The performance over, "the king, coming up to us, said, 'Madame, the maréchal de Bellefond tells me that you are pleased with the play.' I replied, with self-possession, 'Sire, I am charmed; what I feel is not to be expressed by words.' The king said to me, 'Racine has much esprit.' I replied, 'Sire, he has, indeed; but, in truth, these young ladies have it also; they enter into the

subject as if they had never done anything else.' He said, 'That is true,' and then his majesty went away and left me an object of envy." Not long afterward the king again came to Saint Cyr to see the play, bringing with him James II, who in the previous December had been driven from the English throne and was now a guest of France at St. Germain.

The players were anxious that *Esther* should be brought out at their theatre, but Racine persistently refused. Notwithstanding its success at Saint Cyr, it is doubtful whether it would have been well received at the Française; for on being printed it evoked but little commendation. By way of compensation to the company a trifle, called *Le Veau Perdu*, attributed in the registers to Champmêlé, but really written by La Fontaine, met with fair success.

Racine's Athalie.

The success of *Esther* revived in Racine the long-repressed desire for literary fame, and at the end of 1690 he wrote for the girls at Saint Cyr another tragedy of the same kind. This was his *Athalie*, perhaps the most beautiful, though not the most forcible, of his works. His enemies at court were at once up in arms. They assured Madame de Maintenon that the performance of even a Scriptural play could not but have a most pernicious effect upon immature minds. Madame yielded to these representations so far as to put an end to the spectacles at Saint Cyr altogether, but she somewhat inconsistently brought the pupils to Versailles on

two occasions to represent Racine's last tragedy. No stage was fitted up for the purpose, and the young actresses, if we may so call them, appeared in the simple costume which they wore in the school. In spite of these drawbacks, *Athalie* created a deep impression, and the king testified his satisfaction with the play. But fashion decreed that a piece written for children should be read only by children, and before long it became customary to speak of *Athalie*—although few had read it—in terms of mild contempt. Observing the perfect indifference of the public toward his tragedy, Racine feared that he had failed. "Reassure yourself," said Boileau, "the public will come to appreciate it at its proper value; it is your masterpiece." So also thought the Comédiens du Roi; but many years were to elapse before they had an opportunity of convincing the public that such was the case.

In *Athalie*, as in *Andromaque*, the incident is not confined to one or two personages. Jehoida, the high priest; Abner, the warrior; Athaliah, the wicked queen, and Mattan, her priest, are all characters that stand by themselves and leave each his own impression on the hearer or reader. Of the four, the high priest is the best. He and Nero in *Britannicus* are among the few male characters of Racine that are altogether satisfactory. As for Athaliah herself, we feel that we do not see quite enough of her. But it was the object of the dramatist to create in the minds of the spectators, and of the young people for whom the play was written, a horror of the wicked queen, rather than to expose her wickedness too visibly.

Athalie was represented at Saint-Cyr and at Versailles in 1691, and was printed in the same year; but neither that play nor *Esther* was performed at a public theatre in Paris until after the reign of Louis XIV. As a drama, *Athalie* gives us a graphic picture of the determination of the high priest to get the better of the queen, who had usurped the throne, and of his earnest endeavor to bring up the infant king in the right worship, and to preserve him from the dominion of Baal. There is a fine scene in which the child Joash is confronted with the queen. She had gone to see the boy; and as he stands before her boldly answering her questions, we see in his victory over her the good effect of his master's teaching. He has learned right from wrong, and knows how to speak out fearlessly, and to tell the goodness and the justice of his God. It was to teach this lesson that the play was written; and nowhere has Racine achieved his purpose with a finer or more real dramatic success, nor is there in any of his tragedies so much of majesty or of simple grandeur.

In this play Racine has introduced the chorus, as he had done previously in *Esther*. He says in his preface that he has endeavored to imitate the continuity of action as shown in the ancient drama, so that the stage should never be left empty—the intervals between the acts being shown by the songs of the chorus, and these songs having reference to what has previously happened on the stage. The chorus is composed of young virgins of the tribe of Levi. Salomith is their leader. She is an imaginary character, and is supposed to be the sister of Zechariah, and the daughter of Je-

hoida and Jehosheba. She introduces the chorus to her mother; she sings with it, and performs the functions of the coryphæus in the ancient drama.

The Chorus.—The God whose goodness filleth every clime,
Let all his creatures worship and adore;
Whose throne was reared before the birth of time,
To him be glory now and evermore.

A Voice.—The sons of violence in vain
Would check his people's grateful strain,
And blot his sacred name;
Yet day to day his power declares,
His bounty every creature shares,
His greatness all proclaim.

Another Voice.—Dispensing light and life at his behest,
Burst forth the sun by him in splendor drest;
But of Almighty love a brighter sign,
Shone forth thy law, pure, perfect, and divine!

The Chorus.—Justice with mercy to combine,
Is thine, O law, illustrious and divine,
Wisdom's bright crown, calm reason's rule supreme,
Of Israel's faith and love the blest eternal theme.

In the beginning of the second act Jehosheba tells the maidens to stop their singing, and she will go with them into the temple to join the public thanksgiving. As they are going, Zechariah, the son of the high priest and brother to Salomith, rushes on the stage, telling his mother that, as his father was at the altar offering the sacrifice, Athaliah had with a haughty step walked into the court that men only are allowed to enter, and was even about to go into the sacred place reserved for the priests.

Zechariah.—The people, alarmed, fled on all sides. My father—ah, what holy wrath lightened in his eyes! Moses before Pharaoh had seemed less terrible—my father turned upon her. "Queen," he said, "to this sacred ground, from which your sex and your iniquities alike banish you, do you come to brave the sacred majesty of God?" The queen, throwing a fierce glance upon him, opened her lips—to blaspheme, without doubt. I know not if the angel of God revealed himself before her with his glittering sword, but her tongue seemed frozen in her mouth, and her bold front was tamed in a moment. Her eyes in terror gazed around her. Above all, Eliakim struck her with wonder.

Jehosheba.—What! she has then seen Eliakim?

Zech.—We gazed together at that cruel queen, with an equal horror; but the priests wrapped us in their robes, and hurried us away. I know not what followed.

Jehosh.—Ah, she will tear him, doubtless, from our arms! It was he whom she came to seek at God's altar. Perhaps at this moment the object of so many tears — God remember David!——

Salomith.—Who is he—this object of so many tears?

Zech.—Is Eliakim then in danger?

Salo.—Why should he have drawn down the queen's anger?

Zech.—Who would fear a fatherless child?

Jehosh.—Ah, she comes! I will not meet her.

Athaliah, entering in great irritation after her interview with the priest in the temple, sends at once for Mattan, her priest and adviser. Abner, however, comes in first to calm her if possible. He tells the queen that she ought not to have been surprised at the warmth with which Jehoida spoke to her. She, the wife and the mother of a king of Judah, cannot be ignorant of the customs of the people. She must know that the God whom they serve has forbidden them all inter-

course with any other god. Seeing the apostate priest advancing, he attempts to withdraw, but is detained by the queen. She then makes a long address, and begins by exaggerating the authority of her own position and also palliating her own cruelties.

Athaliah.—That which I have done, Abner, I have believed it to be my duty to do; a rash populace cannot be my judge, whatever their insolence has ventured to say; heaven itself has justified me. . . . But since some days fresh trouble has oppressed me. A dream—ought I to give countenance to a dream? —preys upon me, and devours my heart.

She then tells her dream. One night her mother, Jezebel, had appeared before her richly adorned, her face painted, as was her custom, to hide the marks that time had made. "Tremble," she said, "my daughter, worthy of me; for God, the cruel God of Israel, prevails, and you will fall into his awful hands." Her mother's form had seemed to come near to her bed, and she had stretched forward to embrace it, but she found nothing but a hideous mass of mangled flesh and gore. A child had then appeared before her dressed like a young Hebrew priest. His modest mien and noble dignity for a moment calmed her fears; but all at once he drew a dagger, and in a moment plunged it into her breast. This dream had so haunted Athaliah that she prayed Baal to watch over her life; and she wsa even moved to go to the God of Israel, and bring him presents, in the hope that He would thereby be appeased, and that He would be merciful to her.

The child whom Athaliah had seen in her dream

was young Joash. He is a boy nine years old. The scene in which he is made to confront Athaliah is the most dramatic in the play. It is the pivot upon which all the action of the tragedy turns. Little Joash does not yet know who he is, nor even what is his name. He thinks he had been deserted by his mother, and that Jehoida has out of charity adopted him as his son. Hitherto he has not been called Joash, but Eliakim, though the name Eliakim is not applied to Joash in Scripture. When the boy comes in he is attended by Jehosheba, Abner, Zechariah, two Levites, and the whole choir. The queen is at once startled by seeing the same boy that she had already seen in her dream.

Ath.—Wife of Jehoida, is that your son?

Jehosh.—I am not his mother. (Pointing to Zechariah.) This is my son.

Ath.—And you, child, who is your father? Answer me.

Jehosh.—Heaven, till to-day.

Ath.—Why should you answer for him? Let him speak.

Jehosh.—At so tender an age, what explanation can he give?

Ath.—At his age he is innocent; he has no craft to alter the truth. Let him answer for himself.

Jehosh.—(Aside.) Great God, put wisdom in his mouth!

Ath.—What is your name?

Joash.—I am called Eliakim.

Ath.—Who is your father?

Jo.—I am, they tell me, an orphan, thrown since my birth into God's paternal arms.

Ath.—You are without parents?

Jo.—They have forsaken me.

Ath.—But you know at least where your home is?

Jo.—This temple is my home; I never knew any other.

Ath.—But who, then, cared for you in your infant years?

Jo.—Does God ever let his little children want? he feeds the birds, and everywhere his hand is seen. I pray to him every day, and every day at his altar he gives me food.

The queen is much astonished; she is touched by the boy's modesty, and by the softness of his speech. Jehosheba would take the child away; but Athaliah calls him back and continues:

Ath.—What is your daily occupation?

Jo.—I worship God. I am taught his law. In his divine book I learn to read. And already I begin to write it with my own hand.

Ath.—And what does this law teach you?

Jo.—That God desires us to love him; that he will avenge, sooner or later, those who blaspheme his holy name; that he is the defender of the timid orphan; that he will crush the proud man, and punish the murderer.

Ath.—I understand; but all the people in that place, what are they doing?

Jo.—Praising God.

Ath.—Does God desire that they should always pray?

Jo.—Other exercises are banished from his temple.

Ath.—What! have you no other pastime? I pity the sad fate of such a child as you. Come into my palace and see my splendor.

Jo.—No; for I should then forget the goodness of God.

Ath.—I will not ask you to forget him.

Jo.—But you do not pray to him.

Ath.—You may do so if you like.

Jo.—I should see you kneeling before another god.

Ath.—I have my god whom I worship, and you may worship yours: they are both powerful gods.

Jo.—You must fear him too. Mine only is God, madam. Yours is nothing.

Ath.—If you come with me I will give you every kind of pleasure.

Jo.—The happiness of wicked people flows away like a torrent.

Ath.—And who are the wicked?

Jehosh.—Excuse him, madam; he is but a child."

The queen says she wishes to see how the boy has been taught. She invites him to come and live with her. She tells him that she is the queen; he shall sit at her table and shall enjoy all her good things, if he will quit his mean occupation and change his present clothes for others. She promises also to treat him as though he were her own son.

Jo.—As your son!

Ath.—Yes. You say nothing.

Jo.—What a father should I leave! And for——

Ath.—Well?

Jo.—And for what a mother!

Ath.—(To Jehosheba.) His memory is faithful, and in all he says I see the teaching of Jehoida and your own. You employ the quiet in which I leave you to corrupt this simple childhood. You cultivate hate and fury in them—you make my name a horror to them!

At the same time, she does not try to excuse herself. She boldly avows that she glories in having avenged the house of Ahab. Why should she have pity upon those who had no pity upon her? She will return wrong for wrong, and murder for murder. She abhors the name of David, and though she is of his blood, while she lives his children shall be her enemies.

Jehosh.—In all you have done you have triumphed. But God sees, and is our judge.

Ath.—This God, who has so long been your hope, what will become of his prophecies? Let him send you your promised king—this son of David in whom you trust. . . . But we shall meet again. Adieu! I have seen what I wished to see, and I am satisfied.

The queen retires, and Jehoida enters attended by his Levites. He had not been present when the queen was questioning Joash, but he was sufficiently near to hear all that passed, and was ready to help the boy in case of need. He thanks Abner for his protection of Joash, and prepares to cleanse with blood the spots which Athaliah's unholy footsteps had polluted. Then the choir comes in and sings.

Chorus.—What star of lustre strikes our eyes,
How bright does this young wonder rise!
With what a noble scorn
He dares seduction's charms despise;
To high achievements born!

A Voice.—While at the impious decree
Thousands to Baal basely bend the knee,
An infant's voice has dared proclaim
The one adorable eternal name.
Thus before Jezebel, defiled with blood,
Denouncing vengeance, great Elijah stood.

Chorus.—Happy, thrice happy, must he prove,
The child who shares his heavenly father's love,
Who in a blessed hour his voice has heard,
And yields obedience to the sacred word!
'Tis his within the hallowed shrine,
By impious footsteps never trod,
To own the bounteous hand divine,
The guardian care of Israel's God.

O happy youth, so early blest,
On heaven's eternal truth forever rest!

The third act opens with the approach of Mattan, and Nabal, his associate. As the apostate is preparing to enter the temple, Zechariah steps forward and conjures him to go no further. It is forbidden, he says, to the profane to go into the place meant for the worshippers of God. Mattan has been sent by the queen with a message for the high priest's wife.

Jehosheba comes in, and Mattan addresses her in a flattering tone. He tells her that the queen, in spite of his advice and his remonstrances, has sent him to demand the person of Joash as a hostage. If Joash is given up to her she will allow the festival then in progress to go on without hurt or hindrance. Jehosheba is alarmed, and becomes indignant at the demand. Mattan does not know who Joash is; but he suspects him to be a child of high rank, whom Jehoida and his wife are keeping concealed for purposes of their own, and in talking to Jehosheba he endeavors to draw as much as he can of her secret from her. He warns her that suspicions are afloat as to who the child is, and he counsels her to contradict any idle rumors. Jehosheba answers without replying to his question. She tells him it is blasphemy in him, who has lived in deceit and treachery, to invoke God's name in the cause of truth.

Jehoida then comes into the porch of the temple and finds Mattan talking with his wife. His anger is suddenly roused to the highest pitch. He reproves his wife for allowing herself to speak to the false priest;

and he hurls his anathema upon Mattan, who slinks away in alarm. Jehosheba entreats her husband to take some further steps for Joash's safety. But Jehoida decides that the time has come for a decisive step. The boy must be made known to the faithful. Instead of hiding him, the royal crown must be placed upon his brow. The priest Azarias here enters, followed by the chorus of virgins, upon whom Jehoida looks with surprise. But when he learns their purpose to testify their faith in God, he is moved with prophetic rapture. The chorus then commence their songs at the end of the third act.

The fourth act opens with solemn preparations for the coronation. Jehosheba comes in with Joash and Zechariah on each side of her. One of the boys is carrying in his hands the book of the law, and the other is holding David's crown. A Levite precedes them, carrying David's sword. Joash asks his aunt the reason of so much ceremony. She places the crown upon his head, and tells him that before long his doubts will be cleared up; when that time shall come he shall know everything.

The boy sees Jehoida, whom he had always looked upon as his father, coming toward him; he rushes into the high priest's arms, and asks him what is going to happen. The high priest tells him it is now time that he knew what were the designs of God. Jehoida brings to the boy's recollection what he had already taught him of the rights and duties of kings, and of their obedience to God. He mentions Joram and Ahaziah as instances of bad men, and he induces Joash to prom-

ise him that he will not follow their example. Then prostrating himself at the boy's feet, he renders homage and bids him be worthy of David his ancestor. The boy is more confounded than before. Jehoida explains to him how his life had been saved, and he calls in the three chiefs of the tribe of Levi and tells them that they see their king. He has taken charge of his childhood; it is now their office, as ministers of God, to protect their sovereign. At the command of the high priest, the Levites swear that they will put Joash on the throne, and that they will not rest until the sword of David has avenged all his enemies. And Jehoida makes Joash promise that he will always make God his first care; that he will punish the wicked and be merciful to the good; that he will have compassion on the poor, recollecting that he was himself once poor and fatherless. Jehosheba, in her turn, bows down before the boy-king.

A Levite then enters in great alarm, saying that Athalia's trumpets are sounding on all sides, that torches are blazing among her standards, and that she is quickly collecting her army. All chance of help, he says, is cut off, for the mountain on which the temple is built is surrounded by Tyrian soldiers; and the enemy has been boasting that Abner is bound in chains. Jehosheba becomes afraid that her boy will be taken from her, but her husband reproves her for her want of confidence in God's power. The high priest divides his forces, placing the Levites at the four sides of the temple, so as to resist any attack should it be made. He exhorts each one courageously to maintain his post,

and commands them not to leave the temple until he gives them orders. As he is going out he tells the chorus to offer up their hymns to God.

Chorus.—Go forth, ye sons of Aaron, go—
Ne'er did your fathers' bosoms glow
To assert a nobler cause;
Go forth, exert your utmost might,
It is your king for whom ye fight—
Your king, your God, your laws!

A Voice.—Where are the darts thou once didst cast abroad?
Art thou no more a jealous God, O Lord?

Another Voice.—Where are thy favors to our fathers given?
Will nothing reach thine ear in our distress
Except the cry of Judah's wickedness?
Alas! hath mercy left the abode of heaven?

Chorus.—Where are the darts thou didst once cast abroad?
Art thou no more a jealous God, O Lord?

A Voice.—Of Judah's kings the sole remain!
Of David's stem thou lovely flower!
Must we behold thee fall again
Within a cruel mother's power?
Say, did an angel of the Lord
Thee when a helpless infant save?
Or did the mighty voice of God
Recall thy ashes from the grave?

At the beginning of the fifth act Zechariah comes in to tell his sister, Salomith, that the order for the battle has been given. Joash, he says, has been crowned and anointed king, to the great joy and delight of all the Levites. The high priest has set a guard over him, and will not allow him to be exposed to any danger. In the meanwhile Athaliah is scoffing at the brazen gates of the temple; she is waiting until her instruments of war should come to batter them and break them in.

Then there is heard a knocking outside the gates, and Abner enters at one door, and Jehoida and Jehosheba at another. It was thought that Abner was in chains, and the arrival of the warrior-chief now, at the moment of danger, is welcomed with much delight.

In the final scene Abner goes forth to the queen; and Jehoida warns Ishmael, one of the priests, that his orders must be strictly obeyed, lest suspicions be roused in the mind of Athaliah. Her entry is thus to be prepared.

Jehoida.—As soon as the queen, drunk with mad pride, has once crossed the threshold of the temple, that she may not turn back, let the warlike trumpets that instant sound, and spread a sudden dismay throughout the enemy's camp. Call all the people to the succor of the king, and proclaim to all ears the miracle that Joash lives.

The high priest is surrounded by priests and Levites. He makes them stand around the pillar on which the throne is placed; he seats Joash on the throne, and after a few words of exhortation he draws a curtain in front of it, so that this group is hidden from the spectators. When the preparations are complete, Athaliah enters.

Ath.—I find thee at last, traitor, pernicious author of so many plots, whose hope is in continual disturbance. Enemy of power! thy trust was in thy God. Art thou now undeceived? He has left in my power his temple and thy life. On the very altar where thou sacrificest, there ought I—— But I will content myself with the ransom thou hast offered. Fulfil thy promise. Where is this child, and where is the treasure that thou hidest?

Jehoi.—At once shalt thou be satisfied. Behold them both! (The curtain is drawn back. Joash is seen on his throne, his nurse kneeling at his right; Azarias, sword in hand, standing at his left hand; Zechariah and Salomith kneeling on the steps of the throne; several Levites with drawn swords arranged around.) Stand forth, dear child, blood of our kings. Know you, queen, the heir of the holiest of monarchs? At least thou wilt know the marks of thy dagger. Behold thy king, thy son, the son of Ahaziah. Ye people, and thou, Abner, behold Joash!

Ath.—Traitor!

Jehoi.—Seest thou that faithful woman? Thou knowest well whose nurse she was. He was stolen by Jehosheba from thy rage, received in the temple, and preserved by God. This is the only treasure of David left in my hands.

Ath.—Traitor! thy deception will be fatal to him. Soldiers, deliver me from this hateful phantom!

Jehoi.—Soldiers of the living God, defend your king!

In the meantime the temple is in the hands of the people. The queen finds that her followers do not answer to her call. She upbraids Abner for having, as she says, deceived her; and she tries to force her way out of the temple, threatening Jehoida and Abner with her army which she hears coming to her rescue.

Here, however, Ishmael enters and announces that Athaliah's soldiers have fled. The Levites outside have declared to the people what was going on within—that the son of Ahaziah has been preserved, and the daughter of Ahab has fallen in the snare. At the same time the trumpets have sounded, and spread dismay in Athaliah's camp. Joash is proclaimed king with loud shoutings. The holy city is given up to joy. The people bless God, and him whom He has sent. Baal is held in abomination, the gates of his temple broken, and Mat-

tan, his priest, is slain. Athaliah feels that her last hope is irrevocably gone from her.

Ath.—God of the Jews, thou hast got the victory! Yes, it is Joash. I deceive myself no longer. I acknowledge the bearing, the look of Ahaziah; everything betrays the blood that I hate. David, David is triumphant, and Ahab is destroyed. Merciless God, this is thy hand! 'Tis thou that, flattering me with hopes of vengeance, hast twenty times in a day set me against myself; now exciting my remorse for a child, now dazzling me with thought of those treasures which I had feared to give up to flames and pillage. Let him reign, then, this boy, thy care and thy work! and, to mark his advent, let him plunge his sword into my breast. Hear what his mother, dying, desires for him—desires, did I say? nay, prays and hopes—that, faithless to thy law, weary of thy yoke, faithful to the blood of Ahab he has inherited from me—like his grandsire, like his father, this son of David may abolish thy worship, profane thy altars, and avenge Athaliah, Ahab and Jezebel!

As she rushes out, followed by the Levites, Jehoida gives the order to seize and slay her outside the temple.

Jo.—(Descending from his throne.) God, who sees my trouble and distress, turn away these curses from me! Let them not be fulfilled. Let Joash die before he forget thee.

Jehoi.—(To the Levites.) Call the people, that they may see their king. Let them come and swear their allegiance to him. King, priests, people, full of gratitude, let us confirm the holy alliance of Jacob with God, and, humbled by the thought of all our wanderings, renew our vows to him who saves us. Abner, take thy place by the king. (Enter a Levite.) Has that infidel suffered for her crimes?

The Levite.—The sword has expiated the horrors of her life. Jerusalem, so long a prey to her fury, is delivered at last from her hateful yoke.

Jehoi.—By this terrible end, learn, O king of the Jews!—forget this never—that kings have in heaven an awful judge, innocence an avenger, orphans a father.

Says Schlegel, in speaking of *Athalie*: "Racine here exhibited himself for the last time, before taking leave of poetry and the world, in his whole strength. It is not only his most finished work, but I have no hesitation in declaring it to be, of all French tragedies, the one which, free from all mannerism, approaches the nearest to the grand style of the Greeks. The chorus is conceived fully in the ancient sense, though introduced in a different manner in order to suit modern music and the different arrangement of the modern theatre. The scene has all the majesty of a public action. Expectation, emotion and keen agitation succeed each other, and continually rise with the progress of the drama. With a severe abstinence from all foreign matter, there is still a display of the richest variety, sometimes of sweetness, but more frequently of majesty and grandeur. The inspiration of the prophet elevates the fancy to flights of more than usual boldness. Its import is exactly what that of a religious drama ought to be; on earth, the struggle between good and evil; and in heaven the wakeful eye of Providence beaming, from unapproachable glory, rays of constancy and resolution. All is animated by one breath—the poet's pious enthusiasm, of whose sincerity neither his life nor his work allow us a moment to doubt. This is the very point in which so many French works of art, with their great pretensions, are nevertheless deficient;

their authors were not inspired by a fervent love of their subject, but by the desire of external effect; and hence the vanity of the artist is continually breaking forth to throw a damp over our feelings."

Adherbal.

Racine, whose interest in the stage had been revived, went to the Comédie to witness the first performance of *Adherbal, Roi de Numidie*, a new tragedy by Joseph de Lagrange-Chancel. This dramatist, who was not yet eighteen years of age, threatened for a time to eclipse even the fame of Racine himself. Descended from a noble family, he was educated at the Collège de Perigueux and later at the Jesuits' college at Bordeaux, where he developed remarkable talents for poetry, throwing off graceful verses on any subject that might be proposed to him, and even correcting those of his masters. Finishing his college studies at the age of fourteen, his mother took him and his tragedy of *Jugurtha* to Paris, where they were introduced to the princess de Conti. Anxious to become the patroness of such a prodigy, the princess invited him to her home, made him one of her pages, and sent *Jugurtha* to Racine, who gave the young author excellent advice. Eventually the play was brought out at the Comédie, under the title of *Adherbal*, and was favorably received. But Lagrange had his faults. His transitions from one passion or emotion to another were entirely too rapid, presenting rather the shadows of characters than the characters themselves. His versification was often weak and ob-

scure; and most of his scenes were overloaded with incidents and dialogue.

Longepierre.

Another dramatist excited a notable controversy. Longepierre, late secretary to the duke de Berry, challenged the suffrages of the play-goers with a *Médée,* written "in the style of Sophocles and Euripides." The question as to the comparative merits of the ancients and the moderns had been revived with remarkable energy. Perrault, in order to flatter the vanity of the king, had declared in favor of the moderns. Boileau promptly entered the lists on behalf of the ancients, and the battle quickly spread to the entire literary world. No educated man found it possible to observe neutrality, and there was no evading the question, "For the ancients or the moderns?" The combatants on each side fell into some ludicrous errors, many of them showing only how little they knew what they were talking about. The admirers of the ancients held that in science, as well as in poetry and eloquence, their men were supreme; Corneille was declared by the moderns to be more than a match for all the Greek dramatists together. A similar discussion raged in England, and in both countries it was decided in favor of the ancient classics.

In the midst of such a dispute, a tragedy after the style of Sophocles or Euripides, no matter by whom it was written, could not but cause some excitement. Those who favored the ancients were predisposed to condemn it, as falling below the standard aimed at, and

the moderns insisted that it was a fair sample of what Sophocles or Euripides would have done in French. *Médée* was not a work strong enough to withstand this double ordeal, although Champmêlé represented the heroine. The author, in his regard for the severe simplicity of Greek tragedy, excluded anything in the shape of a love intrigue from the plot; but the consequent loss of interest, as was felt by the audience, was not atoned for by loftiness of conception, theatrical effect or force of diction. The play was withdrawn after a few representations, and Longepierre, perceiving that he had failed, made his pride as a martyr subordinate to his veneration for the ancients.

Regnard.

Jean François Regnard ranks, among French comedians, as second only to Molière. Dufresny had lately thrown off a one-act piece under the title of *Attendez-Moi sous l'Orme*, a story of rural love intrigue. Covetous of literary fame, Regnard bought it for three hundred livres and had it produced at the Comédie as his own. Represented only eleven times at the outset, it subsequently became a stock piece at the theatre. A few weeks later, however, he conclusively showed that he could succeed in the drama without assistance. His *La Sérénade*, a one-act comedy in prose, though conventional in plot and character, revealed some of Molière's peculiar qualities in a high degree—gayety, wit, ease and intuitive dramatic skill.

Regnard might have found good materials for a ro-

mantic play in the records of his own life. Eldest son of a prosperous grocer in Paris, he was born there in 1656 or 1657. In early manhood he lost his father, and, finding himself in possession of 40,000 livres, resolved to live for a time in Italy. He there became an inveterate gambler, but played with so much coolness and good fortune that on his return he was richer by at least 10,000 crowns. During a second visit to Italy, he met and fell in love with a married Provençale lady, Elvire de Prade, then staying with her husband at Bologna. "To see her and to love her," he says, "was for me the same thing." Before long M. de Prade abruptly set out with his wife for Rome, where he lived quietly, hoping to escape Regnard's notice. But the young man pursued them, and when they left Rome embarked on the same vessel. Hardly had they put to sea when a Turkish pirate swooped down upon them; and after a short fight, in which the captain and most of his crew were killed, the passengers were made prisoners, landed at Algiers, and sold as slaves to one Achmet Talem.

For about two years the future dramatist had to perform the hardest menial work, until he was promoted to be his master's cook. In this capacity he was transferred to Constantinople, where Achmet Talem, "the hardest man in all Barbary," found it expedient to set up a commercial establishment. Regnard's burden was lightened by the fact that Elvire had been sent with him to the Bosphorus, and intelligence reached them that M. de Prade had died in captivity at Algiers. Some accident gave Regnard an opportunity of communicat-

ing with his family, who transmitted 12,000 livres to the French consul at Constantinople to ransom their unfortunate relative and his beloved Provençale. By the time the money arrived, however, he found himself in an awkward position. Justly or unjustly, he was accused of entering into an intrigue with a Mohammedan girl, and was required by law to become a convert to her religion or die. He promptly chose the former course, but a slave in Achmet's seraglio, inflamed by all the hate of a woman scorned, induced her master to insist upon the immolation of his cook. It was then that the French consul came forward with his offer to ransom the two slaves. As might have been expected, Achmet's cupidity proved stronger than his reverence for the laws drawn up in the name of the prophet. Regnard and Elvire regained their liberty, and, imagining there was no further obstacle to their happiness, repaired homeward to be married. But in Paris a terrible blow awaited the lovers. Ransomed by priests, M. de Prade, the report of whose death was unfounded, reappeared in Paris; and Elvire, perhaps struck with remorse for her infidelity, resumed her position as his wife, with a determination never to speak to her companion in slavery again.

Regnard sought relief for his disappointment in the excitement of foreign travel. He went to Flanders, Holland, Denmark and Sweden. Next, at the instance of the Swedish king, to whom he had letters of recommendation, and accompanied by two friends, he visited Lapland, then all but a terra incognita to the rest of Europe. Having well explored the country the party

penetrated to the lake of Torno, and, ascending Mount Metavara, within sight of the frozen sea, carved on a rock some lines in Latin, stating that they had reached the end of the earth. Earth had indeed failed them; they could get no further north. Back to Stockholm they accordingly turned, to be received there by the king with all the honor due to travellers who had reached higher latitudes than any of their predecessors. Regnard, again left alone, passed into Poland, and was invited by John Sobieski to court. His majesty listened with evident interest to his guest's account of the Laplanders, sent every day to ascertain his wishes, and entertained him at dinner. He extended his tour to Hungary, Turkey and Germany. At length, cured of his passion for travel, for gambling, but not for the bewitching Elvire, he reappeared in Paris, where startling news awaited him. M. de Prade had just died, and Elvire, still under the influence of remorse, was on the point of entering a convent. Regnard spared no pains to divert her from this grim resolution, but apparently without effect. Henceforward the fair Provençale has no place in his biography.

The discarded lover soon became a conspicuous figure in French society. Opulent, hospitable, handsome, of pleasing manners, and furnished by foreign travel and wide reading with a large store of anecdote and information, he soon made a host of friends. Prominent votaries of the muses and of fashion gathered round him at his Parisian house, and at a pretty little château within a day's drive of the capital. He wrote for the Théâtre Italien a three-act comedy, *Le Divorce*,

which at first did not succeed; but Gherardi, who in the following year selected it for his first appearance, gave it a long-enduring vitality. Regnard added seven other pieces to the repertory of the same theatre, the best being one entitled *La Coquette*, and he also took part with Dufresny in several more.

Le Joueur.

Regnard's *Joueur* was represented for the first time near the close of 1696. No one, save the creator of *Tartuffe*, has set before us so striking a character as that of the generous and high-spirited youth who sacrifices to the dice-box most of what a man holds dear—peace of mind, health, fortune, a promising future, the portrait of a beloved mistress. No doubt, Regnard was indebted to his own experience of the gaming-table for some of the most graphic details of the picture, but the picture in its entirety could not have been executed by anything short of dramatic genius. The other characters, too, are drawn with singular skill. It is not easy to conceive a better specimen of the coquette ridicule than the comtesse, a livelier valet than Hector, or a more engaging soubrette than Nérine. In all respects, indeed, the work is one of the highest excellence, and the scene in which Valère, stretched upon a sofa, gloomily ponders over his losses, the valet meanwhile reading to him with imperturbable sang-froid the discourse of Seneca on the vanity of riches, stands alone. Nor were the audience lukewarm in acknowledging the merits of the play. *Le Joueur*

became the talk of the town, and the man who had worn chains at Algiers and Constantinople was recognized as the first comic dramatist of his time.

At the Comédie, following in the footsteps of Molière, though not in a servile spirit, he came very near his model in genuine gayety and dramatic skill, which form the highest and most distinctive feature of his work. His dialogues often show signs of hasty composition.

Jean de La Fontaine.

Jean de La Fontaine, famous as a fabulist, was the most noted poet of his time. He wished also to be a dramatist, but he never possessed the secret of captivating an audience. His pieces are wanting in the essential qualities of good plays, and his delightful style was of a nature to be appreciated in the library rather than the theatre. His earliest known work, written at Château Thierry, his native place, soon after his marriage, at a time when his peculiar genius had been nourished by the study of ancient and mediæval poetry, was a version of the *Eunuchus* of Plautus. It was printed in 1654, but does not seem to have been represented in Paris. For about thirty years he did not again trouble himself with stage work; for he was indolent, careless of fame, unless it came to him without much wooing, and lifted above want by a small patrimony and the hospitality of friends. He now separated from his wife; or rather, the separation seems to have been by mutual consent, for every autumn he paid her a friendly visit at Château Thierry, but failed

to muster more energy, during such periods, than was necessary to produce the *Contes* and the first and second parts of his *Fables*. *Ragotin* broke his long silence in regard to the theatre, and pleased the audience well enough, so that he was induced to write some other pieces. For the Palais Royal, while completing the third portion of his *Fables*, he wrote the score of two operas, *Astrée* and *Daphné*, neither of which succeeded. It appears that he did not rate his powers as a librettist very highly. "Detestable!" he frequently exclaimed in the theatre during the first act of *Astrée*. "Monsieur," said a lady by his side, not recognizing him, "it is really not so bad as you say. It is written by a man of fine wit—M. de La Fontaine." "M. de La Fontaine," was the reply, "is an ass; and as I am that person himself I ought to know." Immediately afterward he went to the Café Procope, just opposite the theatre, and fell asleep. "How is this?" asked a friend, coming in and waking him up. "Ought you not to see the first performance of your opera?" "I have been," said the librettist with a yawn, "but the first act was so dull that I came away when it closed. I admire the patience of these Parisians." This tendency to self-depreciation was allied to peculiar absent-mindedness, simplicity, candor and warmth of heart, though some of the stories told of him are probably exaggerated. Even the prospect of being denied a share of court favor could not deter him from doing public homage to the disgraced minister who had befriended him in early life, thereby causing the king to retard his admission to the Academy. Notwithstanding his lax

morality, he seems to have been regarded with affectionate reverence by his friends, and was always welcome to the homes of the wealthiest among them. For some years he was the permanent guest of Madame de la Sablière, who pleasantly remarked, after breaking up her establishment, that she had "kept only her cat, her dog and La Fontaine." His slight connection with the theatre was brought to a close in *Le Veau Perdu,* produced in 1693. La Fontaine died March 31, 1695, and at his own request was buried by the side of Molière.

Retirement of Thomas Corneille.

In contrast with the proverbial laziness of Lafontaine was the industry of a man of letters now on the point of seeking well-earned repose. During his long career as a dramatist, extending over more than half a century, Thomas Corneille had written thirty-seven plays, besides a new edition of *Vaugelas,* translations from Latin, and other works. He was now old, feeble and nearly blind; and in November of 1695, after writing a *Bradamanthe,* the subject of which, taken from Ariosto, hardly suited the taste of the time, he left Paris to spend the brief remainder of his life in the Andelys.

Fortunes of the Italian Troupe.

For many years the attractiveness of the Italian troupe had been steadily declining. Scaramouche, the actor so highly eulogized by Dangeau, died in 1685. He was more than eighty years of age, but is said to

have retained much of his mimetic power to the end. In order to counterbalance their loss, it would seem, his comrades began to give their pieces with a large admixture of French, if not in French altogether. The Comédie contended that this was an infringement of their privileges, and the king called upon Baron and Dominique—the harlequin of the company—to argue the point in his presence. "Sire," said the latter, when his turn came, "in what language shall I speak?" "In any language you like," replied the king. "In that case," exclaimed Dominique, "I have nothing more to say; my cause is gained." Diverted by the trick, Louis declared that he would not go from his word, and the Italians triumphantly abandoned their mother tongue on the stage. Dominique did not live very long after this incident. "Arlequin," writes Dangeau, on the 2d of August, 1688, "died to-day in Paris. Report says that he was worth three hundred thousand livres. He had been permitted to take the sacrament, having promised not to return to the theatre." Further weakened by his death, the company courted popularity by importing satirical portraits of influential personages into their plays, and by doing so completely cut the ground from beneath their feet. In the spring of 1697 they announced a novelty called *La Fausse Prude*. Madame de Maintenon, learning that its satire was directed against herself, induced the king to send them back to their native country; and the old Hôtel de Bourgogne, which may be called the cradle of French tragedy, ceased for a time to be used as a temple of the drama. Its history was, in truth, an eventful one, as will be seen by those who have

followed in the preceding pages the fortunes of this famous play-house.

Regnard's Le Distrait.

In 1697 Regnard came again before the public with *Le Distrait*, a five-act comedy in verse. The author did little more than dramatize a series of anecdotes strung together by La Bruyère in one of his *Caractères*, the absent-minded comte de Brancas. Now, a personage depending for effect upon sheer absence of mind is not, of course, very dramatic. Such a character might be set with advantage in a one-act comedy, but can hardly bear the weight of five acts constructed with a view to its development. Perceiving this, Regnard sought to make up for want of interest by lively traits of character and diverting minor incidents. He succeeded so well that, in the hands of a competent company, the play would have afforded no little amusement; but this condition, it seems, was not fulfilled at the outset, for *Le Distrait* had only four representations.

Racine's Downfall at Court.

Racine, being historiographer to the king, had bestowed much attention on public affairs, and the sufferings of his countrymen during the wars of Louis XVI excited his compassion. He communicated his ideas on the subject to Madame de Maintenon, who asked him to embody them in writing. Might not the pen which had so often moved the king in verse have a

similar effect in prose? Racine drew up a plan by which the prevailing distress might be materially alleviated. Louis, whose temper had been visibly soured by his humiliations, chanced to find his wife reading the paper. "M. Racine." he said, after looking at it, "must not imagine that because he is a great poet he ought to be a minister of state." Madame de Maintenon was required to dispense with his attendance at court until further orders, and the king, meeting him in the gallery at Versailles, passed him by without a sign of recognition. The poet felt his disgrace very keenly.

Last Days of Racine.

After his virtual expulsion from court, the health of the great dramatist steadily gave way. Neither religion nor philosophy could reconcile him to the loss of the proud position he had enjoyed there for nearly thirty years. It was in vain that the uncrowned wife of the king now and then dropped a word in his behalf. One morning, as the story goes, she met him in the gardens of Versailles, and, drawing aside into an unfrequented grove, assured him that all would yet be well. "Never, Madame," said the dispirited poet. "Have you any doubts either as to my good-will or my influence?" she asked. "I am aware of both," he replied; "but I have an aunt who thinks of me in quite a different way; every day that pious woman implores God to bestow humiliation and occasions for penitence upon me and she has more influence than you." At this point the rumbling of coach-wheels over the gra-

velled path was heard. "It is the king!" cried Madame; "quick, hide yourself." And in a moment he had disappeared in a thicket. Returning to his house in the Rue du Marais St. Germain, he was seized with a violent fever, and the internal malady which had long afflicted him assumed alarming proportions. In extreme pain, but cheered to the last by the presence and sympathy of Boileau, the staunchest of friends, he died on the 21st of April, 1699, at the age of fifty-nine.

Racine was the last of the great poets who shed lustre upon the reign of Louis Quatorze. He had given a new charm to existence, and his successor at the Academy, the erudite Valincourt, bore eloquent testimony within its walls to the pure intellectual pleasure afforded by his work. "His natural gifts as a poet," said the orator, "were seconded by an excellent education. In boyhood, captivated by the beauties of ancient poetry, he would bury himself in the woods near Port Royal to study Homer, Sophocles and Euripides, whose language became as familiar to him as his own. Before long, putting in practice what he had learned from these classic masters, he produced his first great work at an age when it is still a merit to have only read the works of others. Pierre Corneille was then in possession of the stage. The admiration he excited went to the verge of idolatry. Racine, instead of seeking to imitate a man who was deemed on all hands to be inimitable, opened out a path for himself. Contrary to the practice of Corneille, he entered, so to speak, into the spectator's heart, of which he made himself the master. He painted human nature on a less ambitious

scale than his predecessor, perhaps, but with greater truth and sensibility. In the result, the impartial public, without ceasing to admire the majesty of Corneille, began to appreciate the graces of Racine; and the French stage, rising to the height of its glory, had no longer reason to envy the achievements of the theatre of Athens. When, abandoning the profane Muses, he devoted his pen to objects more worthy of his genius, what miracles he still contrived to produce! *Esther* and *Athalie* are equal, if not superior, to *Andromaque* and *Phèdre.* I need hardly speak of the inexpressible charms of his conversation, of the brilliant imagination which made the simplest things attractive in his mouth. And who could believe that a man born with so rare a command of poetry would be a fine orator as well? It would not have been credited in Rome or Athens, but the French Academy is constantly furnishing illustrious examples of such a combination. You do not forget the force and grace with which he spoke at your meetings, especially in descanting upon the merits of the great dramatist whom he followed. To do his own merits justice I should have to borrow the flowers he scattered over the tomb of Corneille on that occasion."

Louis XIV spoke with respect of the man whom he had hurried to the grave. "You and I," he said to Boileau at their next meeting, "have suffered an appreciable loss in the death of Racine." "Sire," replied Boileau, "we have indeed, but I have the consolation of knowing that my friend died as became a true Christian, and afraid though he had always been of death, with unfaltering courage."

In many relations of private life, it must be said, Racine revealed a singular coldness of heart. Yet, by a contradiction of which literary history affords but few examples, he would be deemed exactly the reverse of this if we studied him only through the medium of his works. Here, in diction of peculiar beauty and grace, we find a warm sensibility allied to a keen sympathy with all that is most worthy of human admiration. He seems to have possessed the very spirit of pathos and tenderness.

IV.

Voltaire and His Times.

The preceding chapters have brought to a close the classic age of the French drama. It began in 1636 with the production of Pierre Corneille's masterpiece, the *Cid*, and ended in 1699 with the death of his successor, Racine. In comedy also it was rendered illustrious by Molière, who derived inspiration in tone and style from Corneille's *Le Menteur*. Around these great masters of tragedy and comedy gathered a number of followers and imitators, some of whose productions have been chronicled. The character then impressed on the French drama by the strict etiquette of a court theatre has been rigidly preserved until the present day, and even the grand revolt of the Romanticists in the early part of the nineteenth century effected but slight changes, when comparison is made with the English and German drama.

Every department of French literature in the eighteenth century is dominated by the universal genius of Voltaire.

To his dramatic works, and his so-called reformation of the stage special attention is due. But first a brief

outline of his varied career is needed for proper understanding of the remarkable man, the full embodiment of the literary spirit of France.

Born in Paris in November, 1694, the son of well-to-do parents of the middle class, he bore in youth the name François Marie Arouet. He was educated at the Jesuit college Louis le Grand, but left it at the age of sixteen to enter on the study of law, for which he had no inclination. He had mingled with the sons of families of nobility and distinction. His ambition was to shine in polite circles and enjoy the gay life of the free-livers of the Temple. His wit and facility in composing verses on themes of the day made him a favorite with great nobles, but also brought him into trouble with the authorities. For a libel on the regent he was banished from Paris in 1716, and for a satire later he was imprisoned in the Bastile for nearly a year, though not harshly treated. The time was improved in finishing his tragedy *Œdipe* and in beginning his epic on Henry IV, the *Henriade*. On his release he pursued his chosen career as the skeptical and carping critic of the religious and political traditions of his country. From his pen flowed a constant stream of occasional poems, epigrams, epistles in prose and verse, critical and historical essays and pamphlets, many of them anonymous, but all bearing the imprint of his peculiar genius. Out of his family name Arouet, with the additional letters *l. j.* (standing for *le jeune*, or junior) he formed the anagram Voltaire, by which he has since been universally known. Later he prefixed to it the aristocratic *de*. Church and State pursued him with unrelenting hos-

tility and denied most of his works the privilege of open publication in France. The various devices by which he circumvented the vigilance of the authorities form an amusing chapter in literary history. After being a second time thrown into the Bastile for resenting a nobleman's insult, he was released on condition that he retire to England.

The three years which Voltaire spent in England and the acquaintance which he thus acquired with English life, institutions, literature, and philosophy, were fruitful in the development of his ideas, though they produced no radical change in his character. He was essentially a conservative and an aristocrat. He adhered to the French literary and dramatic traditions and rules, and pronounced Shakespeare "an inspired barbarian." By association with English philosophers he acquired respect for the natural sciences and after his return to France settled at Cirey with Madame du Châtelet who had similar tastes. After her death Voltaire accepted the invitation of Frederick II of Prussia to live at his court. But the visit which commenced in 1750 with mutual congratulations and good wishes was soon marred with jealousies and rivalries, complaints and quarrels. At last the irritable genius fled from the royal hospitality, and though ignominiously arrested at the frontier on some petty charge, was permitted to leave the king's dominions. After some years of wandering Voltaire, in 1755, purchased an estate at Ferney, near Geneva, where he spent practically the rest of his life. His residence became a resort of literary men from all parts of Europe. On his estate he

built a temple with the inscription "Deo erexit Voltaire," and a theatre in which from time to time his plays were performed with the aid of actors from Geneva. In February, 1778, the patriarch of literature was invited to Paris and received a memorable ovation at the theatre at the end of March when his new tragedy of *Irene* was performed amid unbounded enthusiasm. Three months later, on the 30th of May, he died at Paris. By the contrivance of some relatives, in spite of the hostility of the Church, this arch-infidel who had devoted years of his life to the ridicule of religion, secured absolution and the Christian burial which had been denied to Molière. During the Revolution he obtained the further honor of public burial in the Pantheon.

Œdipe.

From this imperfect outline of Voltaire's biography, in which there has been no mention of his most important works, we turn to consider what he did for the French drama. His earliest tragedy, *Œdipe*, is a mixture of adherence to the Greeks—with the pretension, however, of improving on them—and of compliance with the prevailing manners. The best feature of this work Voltaire owed to Sophocles, whom he nevertheless slanders in his preface. But in comparison with the catastrophe in the ancient tragedy, that of Voltaire is flat in the extreme. Not a little, however, was borrowed from the frigid *Œdipe* of Corneille, and more especially the love of Philoctetes for Jocasta, which may be said to correspond nearly with that of Theseus and Dirce in

Corneille. Voltaire alleged in his defense the tyranny of the players, from which a young and unknown writer cannot emancipate himself. We may also notice frequent allusions to priestcraft, superstition, etc., which even at that early period betray the future direction of his mind.

In connection with his *Œdipe*, Voltaire wrote a number of letters to literary friends, partly in apology, but more in the way of criticism, comparing his *Œdipus* with those of Sophocles and Corneille. They also throw some light on the early career of the author. In one he writes, "I send you, sir, my tragedy of *Œdipus*, to the first sketch of which you were a witness, and know that I began it at the age of nineteen. If, therefore, mediocrity in writing is ever pardonable, my youth might be pleaded as an excuse. However, in spite of the defects which abound in this tragedy, and which I am the most forward to acknowledge, I flatter myself you will find it very different from the works which have been imputed to me by ignorance and malignity. I am sensible how hazardous it is to speak of oneself; but having unfortunately been accused before the public, my justification ought to be public likewise." Then follows a long-winded and querulous complaint against the abbé Regnier, whose satirical piece, *J'ai Vu*, had been attributed to Voltaire.

In another letter, which deals with the Greek drama, he advances some startling theories. "Sophocles," he says, "speaks like a declaimer, and Corneille like a poet. I am not at all surprised that Sophocles, in spite of so many imperfections, should have struck the age he

lived in with admiration. The harmony of his poetry and pathos of his style seduced the Athenians, who, with all their sense and politeness, could not form just ideas of an art which was then in its infancy.

"The rudest sketches, in the beginning of an art, affect us as much as the most finished beauties, when we are once acquainted with perfection. Thus Sophocles and Euripides, defective as they are, succeeded as well with the Athenians as Corneille and Racine have with us. Though we blame the Greek tragedies, the genius of their authors claims our respect. Their faults are those of the age they lived in; their beauties belong to themselves. And they would probably, if they had lived in our times, have carried that art to perfection, which they may be almost said to have invented in their own.

"They have fallen, it is true, from that high esteem in which they were formerly held; their works are now either unknown or looked on with contempt; which, I think, should be numbered among those acts of injustice of which our age is guilty; for they certainly deserve to be read, and if they are too defective for our approbation, they are too full of beauties to be altogether despised.

"Euripides particularly, who, in my opinion, is far superior to Sophocles, and would have been the first of poets had he lived in a more enlightened age, has left us tragedies which, in spite of their faults, discover a perfect genius.

"What idea ought we not to entertain of a poet whose sentiments are borrowed by Racine himself? The passages of Euripides, which that great man has translated

in his inimitable tragedy of *Phèdre*, are not the least beautiful of that work:

> Why am I not, ye gods! reclined beneath
> The forest's ample shade? When shall my eye
> View through the noble dust the fervid wheels
> Of his swift chariot flying in its course?
> —Unthinking as I am,
> Where am I and what words have passed my lips?
> Whither do I permit my soul to rove?
> Whither its fond desires? Alas! he's lost;
> The gods have snatched him from my sight.
> Confusion veils my face; the pangs I feel,
> My shame, my anguish, thou perceiv'st too well;
> And, spite of every struggle, down my cheek
> Thick fall unbidden tears.

"Almost this whole scene is translated word for word from Euripides. Let not the reader, however, be seduced by it to imagine the play of Euripides a good composition, for this is the only beautiful passage in his tragedy, nay, the only rational one, and indeed Racine would have imitated no other. But as we never think of praising the *Hippolytus* of Seneca, though Racine has taken all the declaration of Phædra from that author, so neither should we admire the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, on account of thirty or forty lines, which the greatest of our poets has thought deserving of imitation.

"Molière sometimes took whole scenes from *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and said in excuse, 'This scene is good; it of right belongs to me; I resume my property wherever I find it,' and Racine might have said nearly the same of Euripides.

"As to myself, having said so many things to the disadvantage of Sophocles, I ought to lay before you as much as I possibly can in his favor; a part very different from that of the slanderer, who always begins with praise and ends with ridicule. I acknowledge that without the assistance of Sophocles my *Œdipus* would probably have never been completed. From him I took the idea of the first scene of my fourth act; that of the high priest who accuses the king and likewise that of the two old men are entirely his. I wish I were under further obligations to him, which I should be ready to acknowledge with the same sincerity. It is true that, as I am indebted to him for beauties, so am I also for defects, of which I shall take notice in the examination of my play; where I hope to give you an account of those which are immediately my own."

We cannot, of course, attach any weight to the criticism of a man who calls Shakespeare a barbarian, and who says of Sophocles and Euripides that their works are either unknown or looked upon with contempt. Certain it is that, after the lapse of some twenty-four centuries, the dramas of the two Greek masters are better known than those of Voltaire ever were. Yet *Œdipe* contains some remarkable passages for a youth of nineteen to have written, though probably revised in his later years. Take the third scene of the third act, where Œdipus holds converse with Philoctetes, the latter being accused of the murder of Laius, of which Œdipus is really guilty:

Œdipus.—**Fear not the wild capricious multitude,**

Whose voice, oh, prince! thy punishment demands.
Their tumults I have calm'd, and come prepared
Against their rage, if needful, to support thee.
They all suspect the guilty deed was thine,
For rash suspicion is the people's birthright.
But I, who judge not with the giddy vulgar,
Behold, methinks, thy innocence dispersing
This envious cloud, and dazzling e'en their eyes
With its clear lustre. Yet I must confess,
Still undetermined, my uncertain mind
Cannot acquit, nor dares it to condemn.
To heaven I bend, the gods alone must judge.
At length propitious they will seal our pardon,
And soon withdrawing their oppressive arm,
Will, by their priest's decree, announce the victim.

Philoctetes.—Unbias'd is thy equity and pure:
But justice in extreme becomes th' excess
Of injury. We should not always, prince,
Obey the voice of rigor. The prime law
Which ought to sway mankind, is that of honor.
But I am seen to the mean talk reduced
Of answering vile defamers, whom I well
Know to confound. Ah! why shouldst thou descend
To this unworthy care? To stand alone,
My own impartial witness, would suffice;
To set my life before them: Hercules,
Conqueror of Asia, firm support of heaven,
The monsters, the fierce tyrants, whom he taught
This arm to quell, these are the witnesses
With which they should confront me. But I now
Await your gods; consult their oracle,
And learn if they condemn me; nor that I
Need their assistance, and expect their judgment,
Not feeling for myself, but for thy people.

Œdipus had not as yet been denounced as the murderer of Laius. At the close of the first act he says:

Œdipus.—'Tis mine t' avenge both Laius and my people.

All must be heard, the eye must nicely scan,
To pierce the depth of this black mystery.
And you, O gods of Thebes! You gods who now
Bend listening from on high! You before whom
He stands reveal'd, oh, punish the assassin!
Hide thy pure beams forever from his eyes,
Enlightening sun! Let him, his children's horror,
His mother's execration, wandering wild,
Abandon'd, by the universal race
Of men proscribed, bear mingled in his soul
Each curse, each torture of th' infernal regions!
And may his blood-stain'd and unburied corse
Be doom'd a prey to fierce and ravenous vultures!

High Priest.—In this tremendous adjuration
We all unite.

Œdipus.—Gods! let at length the criminal alone
Feel your vindictive blow! Or if the laws
Of your eternal justice to my arm
The care of his dread punishment resign;
If, wearied with resentment stern, you cease
To persecute us still; by your command
Give freedom to obedience! If your rage
Pursues a crime, the agent undisclosed,
Finish your destined work, and name the victim.

In the last act Œdipus has confessed himself guilty, not only of murdering his father, Laius, but of marrying his wife—that is to say, his own mother, though he was not aware of his crimes when he invoked the vengeance of the gods. He still lives, but has put out his eyes with the sword that slew his father. The tragedy ends thus:

High Priest.—Inhabitants of Thebes! A happy calm
Succeeds these tempests; a serener sun
Beams o'er your heads; the pestilential fires
No longer blaze; the yawning tombs are closed;

Death flies; and heaven and earth's almighty fire
Proclaims his goodness by the voice of thunder.

(Thunder and lightning.)

Jocasta.—Why dart these flashes round me? Heaven! Where am I?
What do I hear?—Barbarians——

High Priest.— It is done.
The gods are now appeased; Laius restrains
His enmity, nor from the realms of death
Stirs up revenge against thee; to possess
The throne, to live he suffers thee; the blood
Of Œdipus hath satisfied his wrath.

Chorus.—Immortal powers!

Jocasta.— Oh, my devoted son!
Alas, and can I, dare I say my husband!
Sad, dreadful union of these dearest names!
Is he then dead?

High Priest.— He lives; but by that fate
Which still oppresses him, divided seems
Both from the dead and living; his own hands,
E'er he expires, have violated life.
I saw him thrust into his eyes the sword
Which with his father's blood was erst imbrued;
He hath fulfill'd his melancholy lot.
This destined hour gives the first sign to Thebes
Of health and safety; thus the gods decree;
Their anger rests in peace; they, at their will,
Justice or mercy deal to man below.
They have exhausted all their store of arrows
On thy unhappy son. Live thou, Jocasta—
Thee they forgive.

Jocasta.— I punish then, myself.

(Stabs herself.)

O'er-rul'd by some dire power; foredoom'd to incest;
Death is my utmost wish, the only god
To be invoked by me. Laius, receive
My offered blood! Thy manes I pursue
To the dark regions of the dead; my life

Hath been to virtue sacred, and I die
Without a conscious fear.

Chorus.— Oh, hapless queen!
Oh, destiny, which strikes my soul with horror!

Jocasta.—Reserve your pity for my son alone,
For he still treads the paths of hated life.
Priests, and you, Thebans, who were once my subjects,
Honor my funeral pile; and let your minds
Bear witness ever, that oppressed by fate,
And in the midst of its encircling horrors,
I fix'd the strain of shame upon the gods,
Whose powerful impulse forced me on to crimes.

Merope.

Merope, a work of Voltaire's ripest years, appearing in 1743, was intended as a perfect revival of Greek tragedy, an undertaking of great difficulty, and was long announced with every note of preparation. Its real merit—and that a doubtful one—is the exclusion of the customary love-scenes; for in other respects it contains little of the true Grecian spirit. Moreover the confidants are entirely of the old traditional sort. If well acted, however, *Merope* rarely failed of being received with a certain degree of favor, owing to the nature of its subject. The passionate love of a mother who, in dread of losing her only treasure and threatened with cruel oppression, still supports her trials with heroic constancy, and at last triumphs over them, is altogether a picture of such truth and beauty that the sympathy it awakens is beneficent, and remains pure from every painful ingredient. Still we must not forget that the

piece belongs in a very small measure to Voltaire. How much he has borrowed from Maffei and changed—not always for the better—has been fully pointed out by Lessing.

Oreste.

Of all remodelings of Greek tragedies, *Oreste,* the latest, appears the farthest from the simplicity and severity of the antique, although it is free from any mixture of love-making, and all mere confidants are excluded. That Orestes should undertake to destroy Ægisthus is nowise singular, and seems hardly to merit such marked notice in the tragical annals of the world. It is the case which Aristotle lays down as the most indifferent, where one enemy knowingly attacks the other. And in Voltaire's play neither Orestes nor Electra have anything beyond this in view: "Clytemnestra is to be spared; no oracle consigns to her own son the execution of the punishment due to her guilt. But even the deed in question can hardly be said to be executed by Orestes himself; he goes to Ægisthus, falls, simply enough it must be owned, into the net, and is only saved by an insurrection of the people. According to the ancients, the oracle had commanded him to attack the criminals with cunning, as they had so attacked Agamemnon. This was a just retaliation, for to fall in open conflict would have been too honorable a death for Ægisthus. Voltaire has added, of his own invention, that he was also prohibited by the oracle from making himself known to his sister; and when carried away by fraternal love, he breaks this injunction, he is blinded by the

Furies, and involuntarily perpetrates the deed of matricide.

Brutus.

As the French are in general better acquainted with the Romans than the Greeks, we might expect the Roman pieces of Voltaire to be more consistent, in a political point of view, with historical truth, than his Greek pieces are with the original mythology. This is, however, the case only in *Brutus*, the earliest of them, and the only one which can be said to be sensibly planned. Voltaire sketched this tragedy in England; he had there learned from Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar* the effect which the publicity of a republican episode is capable of producing on the stage, and he wished, therefore, to hold something like a middle course between Corneille and Shakespeare. The first act opens majestically; the catastrophe is brief but striking, and throughout the principles of genuine freedom are pronounced with a grave and noble eloquence. Brutus himself, his son Titus, the ambassador of the king, and the chief of the conspirators, are admirably depicted. The introduction of love into this play need not be regarded a fault, The passion of Titus for a daughter of Tarquin, which constitutes the knot, is by no means improbable, and in its tone harmonizes with the manners which are depicted. La Harpe says that Tullia, to afford a fitting counterpoise to republican virtues, ought to utter proud and heroic sentiments. By what means can a noble youth be more easily seduced than by female tenderness and modesty?

In all the so-called "theatre" of Voltaire, containing in all nearly sixty pieces, including fragments and sketches, there is perhaps none of his works that displays more clearly than *Brutus* the wonderful cleverness which he brought to the task of playing what has been aptly called "the difficult and artificial game of French tragedy." It may, indeed, be said that all his tragedies are of superior merit, while in his comedy only a single play—*Nanine*—can fairly be ranked even in the second class.

Morte de César.

The *Morte de César* is a mutilated tragedy, ending with the speech of Anthony over the dead body of Cæsar, borrowed from Shakespeare. And what a patched and bungling thing it is in all its parts! How coarse-spun and hurried is the conspiracy! How stupid Cæsar must have been, to allow the conspirators to brave him before his face without suspecting their design! That Brutus, although he knew Cæsar to be his father, nay, immediately after this fact had come to his knowledge, should lay murderous hands on him, is cruel, and at the same time most un-Roman. History affords many examples of fathers in Rome who condemned their own sons to death for crimes of state; for the law gave fathers an unlimited power. But the murder of a father, though perpetrated in the cause of liberty, would, in the eyes of the Romans, have stamped the parricide as an unnatural monster. The inconsistencies which here arise from the attempt to observe the unity of place, are obvious to every one. The scene is laid in

the Capitol; here the conspiracy is hatched in the clear light of day, and Cæsar, the while, goes in and out among them. But the persons themselves do not seem to know rightly where they are; for Cæsar on one occasion exclaims: "Let us run to the Capitol."

Catiline.

The same improprieties are repeated in *Catiline*, which is but little better than the preceding piece. From Voltaire's dramatic exhibition of a conspiracy it might be concluded that he had not himself a right understanding on this head, were it not quite evident that the French system rendered a true representation of such transactions all but impossible, not only by the required observance of the unities, but also on account of the demand for dignity of poetical expression. The latter quality was deemed quite incompatible with the accurate mention of particular circumstances, on which, as in this case, depends the truthfulness of the whole. The machinations of a conspiracy and the endeavors to frustrate them are like the underground mine and countermine, with which the besiegers and the besieged endeavor to destroy each other. Something must be done to enable the spectators to comprehend the art of the miners. If Catiline and his adherents had employed no more art and dissimulation, and Cicero no more energy and wisdom, than Voltaire has given them, the one could not have endangered Rome and the other could not have saved it. The piece turns always on the same point; they all declaim against each other, but no one acts; and

CICERO AND CATILINE

Fresco from Roman Senate Chamber, by Professor Maccari

The orator, Cicero, acquainted with Catiline's conspiracy against his country, Rome, exposed it and denounced the arch-conspirator in one of the most eloquent orations ever heard in the Roman Senate.

Catiline was present and heard it all. So amazed and dumbfounded was he with the vigor of Cicero's attack and exposure that he rushed from the temple, amid the curses of the senators, and fled to the army.

at the conclusion the affair is decided as if by accident, by the blind chance of war.

The Triumvirat.

The *Triumvirat* belongs to the acknowledged failures of Voltaire's old age. It consists of endless declamations on the subject of proscription, poorly supported by a mere show of action. Here we find the triumvirs quietly sitting in their tents on an island in the river Rhenus, while storms, earthquakes and volcanoes rage around them; and Julia, the daughter of the Cæsar that was to be, with her affianced, the young Pompeius, although they are travelling on terra firma, are depicted as if they had just been shipwrecked on the strand. And these are only a few among a number of other absurdities. Voltaire, probably by way of apology for the poor success which attended its representation, says: "This piece is perhaps in the English taste!"

To return to the earlier tragedies of Voltaire, there are several in which he brought on the stage subjects never before attempted, and on which his fame as a dramatic poet principally rests; especially *Zaire, Alzire, Mahomet, Semiramis* and *Tancred.*

Zaire.

Zaire is considered in France as the triumph of tragic poetry in the representation of love and jealousy. Lessing has asserted that Voltaire was acquainted only with the legal side of love-making; yet he often expresses

feelings with a fiery energy, if not with that familiar truth and naiveté with which an unreserved heart lays itself open. But in Zaire's cast of feeling there is no trace of Oriental coloring; educated in the seraglio, she should cling to the object of her passion with all the fervor of a maiden of glowing imagination, rioting, as it were, in the fragrant perfumes of the East. Her love, free of all fancy, dwells solely in the head; how is this conceivable with such a character? Orosman, on his part, lays claim indeed to European tenderness of feeling; but in him the Tartar is merely varnished over, and he frequently relapses into the ungovernable fury and despotic habits of his race. But all our sympathy inclines to the oppressed Christian and chivalrous side. What can be more affecting than the royal martyr Lusignan, the upright and pious Nerestan, who, though in the fire of youth, has no heart for deeds of bloody enterprise except to redeem the associates of his faith? The scenes in which these two characters appear are uniformly excellent. The idea of connecting the discovery of a daughter with her conversion can never be too much praised; but the strong effect of this act is injurious to the rest of the piece. Does any person seriously wish the union of Zaire with Orosman, except lady spectators flattered with the homage which is paid to beauty, or those of the male part of the audience who are still entangled in the follies of youth? Who else can go along with the poet, when Zaire's love for the Sultan, so ill-justified by his acts, balances in her mind the voice of blood, and the most sacred claims of filial duty, honor and religion? Though *Zaire* is commonly accepted as

Voltaire's masterpiece, it must be admitted that the love passages are somewhat strained and unnatural.

Alzire.

It was a praiseworthy act of daring, with the singular prejudices then prevailing in France, to exhibit French heroes in *Zaire.* In *Alzire* Voltaire went further, and treated a subject in modern history never yet touched by his countrymen. In the former piece he contrasted the chivalrous with the Saracenic way of thinking; in the latter we have Spaniards opposed to Peruvians. The difference between the Old and the New World has given rise to descriptions of a truly poetical nature. Though the action is purely invented, there is in this piece more of historical and symbolical truth than in most French tragedies. Zamor is a representation of the savage in his free, and Monteze in his subdued state; Guzman, of the arrogance of the conqueror, and Alvarez, of the mild influence of Christianity. Alzire remains between these conflicting elements in an affecting struggle between attachment to her country, its manners, and the first choice of her heart on the one hand, and new ties of honor and duty on the other. All the human motives which were against the passion of Zaire speak in favor of Alzire's love. The last scene, where the dying Guzman is dragged in, is almost overpowering. The noble lines on the difference of their religion, in which Zamor is converted by Guzman, are borrowed from an event in history; they are the words of the duke of Guise to a Huguenot who wished to kill

him; but the merit of the poet is not therefore less in applying them as he has done. In short, notwithstanding the improbabilities in the plot, which have often been censured, *Alzire* appears to be the most fortunate and also the most finished of all Voltaire's dramatic compositions.

Mahomet.

In *Mahomet,* want of true singleness of purpose has fearfully avenged itself on the artist. He may affirm as much as he pleases that his aim was directed solely against fanaticism; there can be no doubt that he wished to overthrow the belief in revelation altogether, and that for this object he considered every means allowable. We have thus a work which is productive of an alarmingly painful effect, equally repugnant to humanity, philosophy and religious feeling. The Mahomet of Voltaire makes two innocent young persons, a brother and sister, who, with a childlike reverence, adore him as a messenger from God, unconsciously murder their own father, and this from motives of the incestuous love in which, by his permission, they had become unconsciously entangled. The brother, after he has blindly executed his horrible mission, he rewards with poison, and the sister he reserves for the gratification of his own vile lust. This tissue of atrocities, this cold-blooded delight in wickedness, exceeds, perhaps, the measure of human nature; but, at all events, it exceeds the bounds of poetic exhibition, even though such a monster should ever have appeared in the course of ages. But further, what a disfigurement, nay, distortion, of history! He

ARSACES SLAYS HIS MOTHER

After an original painting by W. de Leftwich Dodge

ARSACES. *Whom then have I slain; whose blood is this?*

ASSURUS. *Behold, wretched man, thy mother!*

SEMIRAMIS.—VOLTAIRE

WM O. LODGE

has given us, moreover, none of the effect of Eastern imagery; for not a trace of Oriental coloring is to be found. Mahomet may have been a false prophet, but he was certainly one under the inspiration of enthusiasm; otherwise he could never have revolutionized half the world by his doctrines. What an absurdity to make him merely a crafty and diabolical deceiver! One alone of the many sublime maxims of the *Koran* would be sufficient to annihilate the whole of these incongruous inventions.

Semiramis.

In *Semiramis* we have a motley patchwork of French manners and mistaken imitations. It has something of *Hamlet*, and something of *Clytemnestra* and *Orestes;* but nothing of any of them as it ought to be. The passion for an unknown son is borrowed from the *Semiramis* of Crébillon. The appearance of Ninus is a mixture of the ghost in *Hamlet* and the shade of Darius in *Æschylus*. That it is superfluous has been admitted even by the French critics, and Lessing, with his raillery, has scared away the apparition. With a great many faults common to ordinary ghost-scenes, it has this peculiar one, that its speeches are dreadfully bombastic. Notwithstanding the great zeal displayed by Voltaire against subordinate love intrigues in tragedy, he has contrived to exhibit two pairs of lovers, the *partie carée* as it is called in this play, which was to be the foundation of an entirely new species. Whatever it may be that attracts the reader or spectator to the drama of Voltaire, assuredly it was not his love-

making; for this was probably his weakest point, as satire and invective were his strongest.

Tancred.

Since the *Cid* no French tragedy had appeared of which the plot was founded on such pure motives of honor and love, without any ignoble intermixtures, and so completely consecrated to the exhibition of chivalrous sentiments, as in Voltaire's *Tancred*. Améniade, though honor and life are at stake, disdains to exculpate herself by a declaration which would endanger her lover; and Tancred, though justified in esteeming her faithless, defends her in single combat, and, in despair, is about to seek a hero's death, when the unfortunate mistake is cleared up. So far the piece is irreproachable; but it is weakened by many imperfections. It is of great detriment to its perspicuity that we are not at the very first allowed to hear the letter without superscription which occasions all the embarrassment, and that it is not sent off before our eyes. The political disquisitions in the first act are extremely tedious; Tancred does not appear till the third act, though his presence is impatiently looked for, to give animation to the scene. The furious imprecations of Améniade, at the conclusion, are not in harmony with the deep but soft emotion with which we are overpowered by the reconciliation of the two lovers whose hearts, after so long a mutual misunderstanding, are reunited in the moment of separation by death. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, *Tancred* disputes with *Zaire* the claim to rank as Voltaire's chef d'œuvre,

though the latter yields to none of its class among plays where love is the leading motive.

Orphelin de la Chine.

In the earlier piece of the *Orphelin de la Chine* it might be considered pardonable if Voltaire represented the great Jenghiz-khan in love. This drama ought to be entitled *The Conquest of China*, with the conversion of the cruel khan of Tartary. Its whole interest is concentrated in two children, who are never once seen. The Chinese are represented as the most wise and virtuous of mankind, and they overflow with philosophical maxims. As Corneille, in his old age, made one and all of his characters politicians, Voltaire in like manner furnished his out with philosophy, and availed himself of them to preach his favorite opinions. He was not deterred, moreover, by the example of Corneille from publishing, when the power of representing the passions was extinct, a host of weak and faulty productions.

Voltaire a Borrower.

In common with other French dramatists, Voltaire borrowed freely, not only from his own countrymen, but from the Spaniards, the Italians and the English, not disdaining even the Chinese, as appears in the last of the works above noticed. Nor was he content to be merely a borrower, but must adapt to his own style—and that too often by no means for the better—what he had taken without acknowledgment or recognition,

while often heaping abuse on those on whom he levied tribute. His *Brutus* and *Le Mort de César* owe much to the *Julius Cæsar* of Shakespeare, as does his *Zaire* to *Othello;* and that he did not borrow more from the great English dramatist was because he understood him imperfectly. Moreover, he did not love the English overmuch, though sometimes doing them justice, as where he writes to Helvetius: "We have borrowed from the English annuities, reversible funds, sinking funds, the construction and manœuvring of ships, the laws of gravitation, the differential calculus, the seven primary colors and vaccination. Imperceptibly we shall acquire from them their noble freedom of thought and their profound contempt for the petty trifling of the schools." Truly a most liberal admission.

Voltaire's Comedies.

Though Voltaire's comedies were never highly esteemed, he has produced in several of his plays, and especially in his *Enfant Prodigue* and *Nanine*, a mixture of comedy and sentiment that is deserving of all praise. The *Enfant* was a favorite piece on the boards for two years, and on its first appearance was represented for thirty successive nights. The play opens with a scene between Rondon and Euphemon, two citizens of Cognac, Lise, the daughter of the former, being betrothed to Fierenfat, younger son of the latter. The translation is given in prose, though the original was in pentameter verse—the first French comedy written in that measure:

Rondon.—My old neighbor, my dear and melancholy friend, with what joy I shall forget your misfortune! how happy I shall be! What pleasure I promise myself in seeing my daughter re-animate your mournful family! But your son, Master Fierenfat, seems to behave in a very odd manner.

Euphemon.—How so?

Ron.—Proud of being a magistrate, he makes love by weight and measure. A young stripling of a scholar, who puts on airs of gravity, and moralizes to us like a Cato, is in my eye a mighty ridiculous animal. I had rather he had the air of a madman, than of a pedant; in short, he is too self-sufficient.

Euph.—And you are a little too blunt.

Ron.—It is my nature. I love the truth, and am pleased to hear it. I take delight, I confess, in reprimanding my son-in-law, in mortifying his conceit, and laughing at his stiff, pedantic air. You acted like a very wise father when your eldest son, that gamester, that debauchee, that wild, mad profligate went away, to give every thing to this foolish younger brother; to place all your hopes on him, and to purchase for him the presidentship of this city. O yes, that was a wise proceeding; but as soon as he became Mr. President, in good truth, he was puffed up with impertinence, his gravity must walk and talk in exact time. He even says that he has more wit than I, who, it is very well known, have a great deal more than you; he is——

Euph.—Well, but what a strange humor you are in? Must one always——

Ron.—Ah, no matter; of what consequence is it? When one has amassed a large fortune, all those defects are trifling; he is avaricious, and every miser is a prudent man. O, it is a charming vice in house-keeping! a most excellent vice. Come, he shall be my son-in-law this very day, and shall have my Lise. Nothing now remains, but to make a full assignment of all your effects, hereditary or purchased, present and future, to your son; only reserving to yourself a decent income during your life. Let everything be quickly signed and sealed, that the young gentleman your son, being well portioned, may unite an immense fortune to ours; otherwise my

daughter Lise will immediately provide herself with another husband.

Euph.—You have already, Sir, my promise, and I will perform it; yes, Fierenfat shall enjoy my whole estate. I wish to spin out the remains of a miserable life in the bosom of some calm retreat; but I should rest better satisfied if he, to whom I have given such riches, was less eager to be possessed of them. I have beheld the mad debauchery of one son; I now behold in the other a self-interested soul.

Ron.—So much the better, I say, so much the better.

Euph.—My dear friend, I was born only to be an unhappy father.

Ron.—O, you are going to entertain us with your lamentations, your sorrows, and your tiresome complaints. Do not you want your hopeful heir, that arrant rake, who is hardened in vice, to return and spoil our approaching pleasures, to disturb the hymeneal feast by his unwelcome presence?

Euph.—No.

Ron.—You want him to come, perhaps, without ceremony, and set your house on fire?

Euph.—No.

Ron.—To beat you, and carry off my daughter Lise, who was formerly promised to him; my dear Lise, who——

Euph.—May that lovely maid ever be preserved from such a profligate.

Ron.—Would you have him return to strip his father of all he is worth, to succeed to his estate?

Euph.—I shall give it all to his brother.

Ron.—Ay, or he shall never have my daughter.

Euph.—He shall have Lise, and all my fortune, this very day; and his elder brother have nothing for his inheritance, but the indignation of an injured father; he has deserved it, for he is an unnatural son.

Ron.—O, you bore with him much too long; the other, at least, conducts himself prudently; but for him, good God! what extravagant proceedings! what a libertine he was! Do you remember, ha! ha! it was a comical trick to be sure, how

he stole from you, horses, clothes, linen, furniture and plate, for the establishment of the little Jourdain, who deserted him the very next morning? I have often laughed at it, I confess.

Euph.—O what satisfaction can you have in renewing my tears!

Ron.—And then his betting twenty rouleaus upon an ace—O Lord!

Euph.—Have done, I beseech you.

Ron.—Do you recollect also, when this mad-cap was to have been betrothed, in the face of the Church, to my little Lise, in what place he had concealed himself, and for whom too?—Plague on the debauched rascal!

Euph.—Spare me, I pray, the recital of such shameful stories, which stamp his character with the blackest dye. Am I not sufficiently unfortunate? I quitted the place of my birth to save myself from uneasiness, and to remove forever from my sight every thing that might recall to my remembrance a misfortune that distracts me. Your business made you settle in this place, my friendship for you and my grief induced me to follow you; treat them with more delicacy, my good Rondon. You are always proclaiming some truth or other; and truth, let me tell you, is sometimes disagreeable.

Ron.—Well, I will say no more; let it be so; I ask your pardon. But, the deuce, you were greatly to blame, when you knew the fiery temper of your son, to make a soldier of him.

Euph.—Again!

Ron.—Pardon me; but you ought——

Euph.—I know I ought to forget everything for this new bargain we have agreed upon, for my youngest son and his marriage. But, tell me, do you think that this prudent youth has been able to gain the affections of your daughter?

Ron.—Without doubt; my daughter is a girl of honor, and obeys my supreme authority. When I say you must fall in love, her docile heart, which I can turn as I please, falls in love that very instant, without ever attempting to argue the case. I formed her young mind after my own fashion.

Euph.—I doubt, nevertheless, that her inclinations will be guided by your instructions; and I am much deceived if she

answers the pains you have bestowed upon her. My eldest son, indeed, obtained the sacrifice of the rising wishes of her inexperienced mind; I well know how strong are the first impressions of love; the heart is then tender, and does not cease bleeding in the space of one day.

Ron.—You are in your dotage surely.

Euph.—Whatever you may say, that hare-brained fellow was very capable of winning her affections.

Ron.—He! no indeed; he was one of the most insignificant of men. No, old gentleman, never fear; after those pretty tricks he played, I forbade my daughter to love him—make your mind easy on that head; when once I have said no, nobody thinks of saying yes. But here she comes, you will see how it is.

SCENE II.

Euphemon, Rondon, Lise, Martha (maid to Lise).

Ron.—Come hither, Lise; this day will be a day of great consequence to you. If I should chance to give you a husband, who is either young or old, ugly or handsome, grave or gay, rich or poor, do not you feel a desire to please him, to have an inclination, a love for him?

Lise.—No, sir.

Ron.—How, baggage!

Euph.—O ho! my liege, your authority seems to stagger a little; pray, what is become of that despotic empire you just now boasted of?

Ron.—What, after all I have said to you, will you not conceive some small affection for your future husband?

Lise.—No, sir.

Ron.—Know you not that your duty compels you to give him your whole heart?

Lise.—No, sir. I tell you, I know, sir, how far the sacred tie of marriage ought to influence a heart which is devoted to virtue. I know that a wife, amiable and prudent, should endeavor to merit the tenderness of her husband, and at least make amends, by her goodness, for the want of beauty which

fortune may have denied her; abroad, she ought to be discreet and reasonable; at home, mild, even-tempered and agreeable. With respect to love, it is quite a different affair; we cannot command our inclinations, therefore do not attempt to force them, for love flies away from slavery; everything else my husband has a right to claim, but for my heart, he must deserve it; that heart, which is rather difficult to subdue, will never be induced to love by the order of a father, by the arguments of reason or the quibbles of a lawyer.

Euph.—In my opinion this may be called a sensible manner of reasoning, and I very much approve the justice of her sentiments. My son ought to study to render himself worthy of a heart as generous as it is tender.

Ron.—Will you be silent, you flattering, complimenting dotard, you arrant corrupter of youth? But for you, my daughter, who has been properly educated, would never have dared to have uttered such nonsense in my presence. (To Lise.) Hark ye, Miss, I have procured you a husband, who, perhaps, is a little of a coxcomb, and gives himself rather too many airs; but it is my duty to correct my son-in-law, and yours to receive him, such as he is. You'll love one another, if it be possible, and be obedient to all my commands; that is the task you have to perform. And now, father-in-law, let us go to sign and seal everything at my lawyer's, who will pour forth, in a hundred superfluous words, what might be as well expressed in four. Come, let us away, to hasten his scrawling redundancies, and rattle the old, plump gentleman; that visit paid, I will return and scold your son, your daughter and yourself.

Euph.—Very well, sir. I attend you.

SCENE III.

Lise, Martha.

Martha.—Bless us! how he joins to his grotesque figure the most comical ideas and manner of acting.

Lise.—I am his daughter, and the strangeness of his humor does not in the least affect the goodness of his heart. Under

the severity of a knitted brow and rough outside, he still has the soul of a father; nay, sometimes even in the midst of his harangue, whilst he is scolding me, he yields to my advice; to be sure, when he blames the person and faults of the husband he has provided for me, and shows me all the dangers of such a union, he is very much in the right; but when afterward he commands me to love him, my God! how I feel he is greatly in the wrong.

Martha.—How is it possible to love such a one as Monsieur Fierenfat? I would sooner marry an old soldier, who swears, drinks, beats his wife, and yet loves her, than a puppy of the long robe, enraptured with himself, who, with a voice of gravity and pedantic air, seems as if he were passing sentence on his wife whenever he speaks to her; who, bridling under his band, surveys himself like a peacock with admiration; and who, still more covetous than conceited, makes love to you while he is reckoning up his money.

Lise.—O, your pencil has painted him to the very life; but what can I do in this case? I must submit to have my inclinations forced in his approaching marriage; we cannot dispose of our destiny to our own liking; my relations, my fortune, my age, all unite to urge me into matrimonial bondage. This Fierenfat, notwithstanding my disgust of him, is the only one here who can well be my husband; he is the son of my father's best friend; the match is absolutely become necessary. Alas! what heart can now, unrestrained, sigh and dispose of itself according to its natural impulse? I must yield; time and patience will perhaps get the better of my aversion to my husband, and, submissive to the yoke, I may at last become as indulgent to his faults as to my own.

Martha.—Very wisely spoken, my fair and prudent mistress; but you rather disguise the real sentiments of your heart. If I were permitted—but you have ordered me never to mention the elder brother.

Lise.—How!

Martha.—Euphemon, who, with all his vices, obtained sacrifice of your maiden affections; he also loved you.

Lise.—He never loved me; let me no more hear his detested name.

Martha.—(Going away.) Well, we will talk no more of him.

Lise.—(Detaining her.) That youth, indeed, surprised me into a tenderness for him; but was he calculated for a virtuous mind?

Martha.—(Going.) He was a madman, very dangerous, upon my word.

Lise.—(Detaining her.) Surrounded, when young, by corrupters of every sort, he rushed headlong, unthinkingly, into every excess. Wretch that he was! he sought variety of pleasures, but knew not what was meant by love.

Martha.—Yet you once seemed to imagine that he placed his whole glory in adoring you, and, as a captive, wore your chains.

Lise.—If his passion had been real, I could have reformed him; a sincere affection, without caprice or disguise, is, in fact, the surest curb on vice; he who can be restrained by such a tie is an honest man, or will soon become so; but Euphemon disdained the control of his mistress, and quitted her tenderness for debauchery; those false friends, those indigent villains, who led him into the snare after having consumed his mother's property, robbed in his name his unfortunate father; to complete the whole, those infamous seducers dragged him far away from the arms of his father, from these eyes, which, drowned in tears, still wept for his vices and his charms. I am now no longer interested for him.

Martha.—His brother, at length, is appointed his successor, and is to marry you. Faith it is pity; for the other had a handsome face, fair hair and a well shaped leg, danced, sung—in short, was born for love.

Lise.—Ah! what is that you say?

Martha.—Even in his wildest moments, in the midst of his follies and dissipations, one might easily discover, under the veil of those defects, a certain fund of honor in his breast.

Lise.—He surely was by nature formed for virtue.

Martha.—Do not suppose, Madame, that I am praising him; but he appeared to be neither a flatterer, a railer, a sharper, nor a liar.

Lise.—No, but——

Martha.—Let us be gone; here comes his brother.

Lise.—We must stay; it is a necessary evil.

SCENE IV.

Lise, Martha, Fierenfat.

Fierenfat.—I confess, Madame, that this increase of fortune will greatly augment the satisfaction you will have in such a marriage; an accession of wealth is the very soul of housekeeping. I think I may say without vanity that I possess fortune, honors and dignities; and throughout the whole territory of Cognac, Madame, you will be entitled to the honor of precedency among the first ladies of the beau monde, a pleasure, I assure you, not a little flattering; you will hear them whispering, one to another, that is Madame la Presidente. Indeed, when I take a survey of my rank, my estate, the privileges of my office, and my agreeable situation in life, together with the right of seniority, which will be assigned to me, I cannot help, Madame, congratulating you on the occasion.

Martha.—For my part, I pity her. ' It is a scandalous thing that you must, on every occasion, interlard your discourse with your good qualities, your rank and your fortune; to be at once a Midas and a Narcissus; puffed up with self-conceit and pinched with avarice; always surveying, with an eye of satisfaction, both your person and your money; a covetous petit maitre with a band on, the most uncommon, ridiculous character imaginable; a young coxcomb may be endured, but a young miser, in my opinion, is a monster.

Fier.—It is not probably to you, honey, that my father intends to marry me to-day, but to this lady; therefore, if you please, do not interest yourself quite so much in our affairs; silence will best become you. (To Lise.) For you, Madame, who in an hour or two will be my wife, I hope you will have the goodness to discharge, before night, this brazen faced champion of yours, who under the title of a chambermaid, gives full scope to her impertinence. I am not a president for nothing, I assure you, and may chance to get her lock'd up for her own benefit.

Martha.—(To Lise.) Save me, Madame, speak to him, speak boldly. I am your servant, don't let him lock me up; who knows but he may lock you up too?

Lise.—I prophesy no good from all this. (Aside.))

Martha.—Speak to him, then, and leave off muttering to no purpose.

Lise.—Alas! what can I say to him?

Martha.—Abuse him.

Lise.—No; reason will have a better effect.

Martha.—No reasoning; believe me, it is the surest way—

SCENE V.

Lise, Martha, Fierenfat, Rondon.

Rondon.—A very pleasant adventure, forsooth.

Fierenfat.—Why, what's the matter, sir?

Ron.—I will tell you. I was going to carry the writings to the old gentleman, your father, when I met him hard by here, at the foot of that rock, conversing with a traveller, who had just alighted from a coach.

Lise.—Was it a young traveller?

Ron.—No, truly; he was an old, wrinkled, toothless fellow, on crutches. I saw the two superannuated beings rubbing their beards together; their hump-backs rose and fell to the tune of their long-winded sighs, and their noses were bewetted with the tears that distilled from their gummy eyes; at last Euphemon, with a screwed-up face, suddenly retired to his own house; he told me that he was uncommonly afflicted, that he must at least cry for some minutes before he could sign the deeds, and desired that nobody would pretend to speak to him.

Fier.—O, I shall go myself and console him; all of you know how I can manage him; indeed the affairs concern me nearly. I am well acquainted with his disposition; the moment he sees me, with the contract in my hand, he will sign it. But time is precious, and my new right of seniority is an object worthy of attention.

Lise.—There is no occasion to be in such a hurry, sir.

Ron.—Yes, there is occasion, Madame; all this is owing to you.

Lise.—How, sir? To me!

Ron.—Yes, Madame, to you; all the crosses and disappointments which disturb the peace of families, proceed from disobedient daughters.

Lise.—What have I done, sir, to make you so angry?

Ron.—You have done—you have thrown us all into confusion; but I will go and find out these two Marplots, and beat a little sense through their thick skulls. I am resolved you shall be married immediately in spite of their teeth; nay, in spite of yourself, if I like it.

Thus ends the first act. In those which follow there is too much moralizing—a fault all too common with Voltaire; but in the two last acts, where the elder son of Euphemon, having returned home, makes himself known to Lise and his father, there are touches of true pathos. To Lise he declares that he has reformed; that "vice, though pursued, was an alien to his heart." She interrupts his confession by asking: "And does Euphemon still love me?" "Do I love you?" he replies, "Alas! through love alone I have existed; that only has sustained me. I have suffered many things, even to infamy, and my hand was a hundred times ready to cut short the thread of my life, but I cherished my being because it was your property. Yes, to you I am indebted for my present sentiments, for my existence, and that new course of life which perhaps will shine propitious on me; to you I am indebted for the return of reason, if, indeed, it is possible to preserve it with a love like mine." Asked whether he has not seen his

father yet, young Euphemon replies: "I blush to show my guilty face to that good old man, whom I have disgraced. Detested by him, and banished without hope, I dare to love him, but I fly his presence."

Lise.—What, then, are your intentions?

Young Euphemon.—If heaven prolongs the period of my days, and if it is your destiny to be united with my brother, I shall change my name, as well as my condition, serve as a soldier, and seek an honorable death on the field of battle.

Lise.—This desperation proceeds from a noble mind, from a heart that is superior to its follies. Such sentiments affect me more sensibly than the tears you have showered down at my feet. No, Euphemon, if I can dispose of myself, if I can any way escape the marriage which is proposed to me, and can possibly have the direction of your fortune, you shall not go so far to make an alteration in it.

In the final act there is a reconciliation quite in the manner of the prodigal son, for which Lise has paved the way.

Euphemon.—I loved my son; let these tears bear witness of it. O, if he still exists! if he is a convert to virtue! Explain yourself, Madame, speak to me.

Lise.—I will, sir; it is now time that you should be satisfied. (She steps aside and speaks to young Euphemon, who is behind the scene.) Come forth!

Euphemon.—Heavens! what do I see?

Young Euphemon.—(Kneeling.) O my father! acknowledge me; decide my fate; one word determines me to wish for life or death.

Euph.—Ah! What brings you here at this juncture?

Young Euph.—Repentance, love and nature.

Lise.—(Kneeling with him.) Behold your children at your feet. Yes, sir, our sentiments and our hearts are the same.

Young Euph.—(Pointing to Lise.) Alas! her kind indulgence has pardoned the extravagance of my offenses; follow, sir, in favor of an unfortunate wretch, the blessed example which love has given you; my only hopes, in the height of my misery, were to die beloved by you and her; and O, if I live, it will be to merit that affection with which I dare to flatter myself. You turn away your eye from a poor unfortunate! What panic agitates your soul? Is it hatred? and must your son be condemned.

Euph.—(Raising him up and embracing him). It is tenderness. All, all is forgiven thee. If virtue is at length triumphant in thy breast, I am still thy father.

Lise.—And I his wife. O sir, I was once promised to him; permit us at your feet to ratify our first engagement; it is not, sir, your fortune which he requires; no, he presents you with a heart too pure for such requisition; he desires nothing; if he is virtuous, all I have will be sufficient for us both.

Rondon and Fierenfat now appear on the scene.

Fierenfat.—Ah! there he is, still talking to Lise; let us boldly take our gentleman by surprise; let us show a courage above the common pitch.

Rondon.—Let us be resolute; we are six to one.

Lise.—(To Rondon.) Open your eyes, sir, and know who it is I love.

Ron.—It is he.

Fier.—Who?

Lise.—Your brother, sir.

Euphemon.—The very same.

Fier.—You are jesting, I believe; what, this rascal my brother?

Lise.—Yes, sir.

Ron.—What a change! That is my young spark, is it?

Fier.—Oh, oh, I play a very comical part here. God bless me, what a brother!

Euph.—Yes, sir. I had lost him, but repentance and Heaven have restored him to me.

Fier.—What a villainous heart he must have, to come back only to take away my wife from me.

Young Euph.—(To Fierenfat.) It is at length necessary that you should know me. It is you, sir, who were going to deprive me of her. There was a time when I possessed her affections; but the extravagance of unbridled youth deprived me of a treasure of the highest estimation, and of which I knew not the value; on this propitious day I have found again my integrity, my mistress and my father. Do you envy me because the rights of blood and the rights of love are unexpectedly restored to me? Take my fortune, I give it up to you; you love money, and I her person; thus we shall both be completely happy, you in my estate and I in the possession of her heart.

Euph.—Such disinterested goodness shall never be so ill rewarded; no, Euphemon, thy father does not choose to present thee to her without any estate or settlement.

Lise.—(To Rondon.) And you, my dear father, permit, I entreat you, that my sincere and faithful heart, which never can dispose of itself but once, may return to its first allegiance.

Ron.—If, indeed, he is less hare-brained, and——

Lise.—O, I will be answerable for it.

Ron.—If he loves you; if he is prudent——

Lise.—Have no doubt about it.

Ron.—If, above all, Euphemon will make him a present of a handsome settlement—I will give my consent.

Fier.—I certainly gain a great deal by finding this brother of mine; but, nevertheless, I lose in a moment my wedding expenses, my fortune and my wife.

Universality of Voltaire's Genius.

It cannot even be claimed for Voltaire that he was ever a dramatic poet in the same sense as were Corneille

and Racine. The former tragic master led a truly artistic life; his whole soul was wrapped up in his work, and all his studies and desires were directed to the stage alone. In a measure the same is true of Racine, though a mistaken sense of religious duty did succeed in withdrawing him for many years from active work for the stage. Voltaire, on the contrary, with his universal genius, must shine in every department of literature, and a restless vanity never permitted him to be content with striving after perfection in any single branch. In tragedy he attempted to excel even those whom he declared to have surpassed the choicest works of the Attic muse; nor is it wonderful that his dramatic aspirations were the least successful of all his many-sided efforts after fame. From the variety of subjects on which his mind was employed, it was impossible for him to avoid occasional shallowness and immaturity of ideas. To form a correct estimate of his relation to his two great predecessors in the tragic art, we must compare the characteristic features of the preceding classic age and of that to which he gave the tone. In the time of Louis XIV a certain traditionary code of opinions on all the most important concerns of humanity reigned in full force and unquestioned. Even in poetry, the object was not so much to enrich as to form the mind, by a liberal and noble entertainment. But, finally, the want of original thinking began to be felt, and it unfortunately happened that presumption went far in advance of inquiry. Hence the spread of public immorality was quickly followed by a dangerous, scoffing skepticism, which shook to the foundation every religious

and moral conviction, and the very principles of society itself.

Voltaire was by turns philosopher, rhetorician, sophist and buffoon. The want of singleness, which more or less characterized all his views, was irreconcilable with complete freedom from prejudice, even as an artist in his career. As he saw the public longing for information, which was rather tolerated by the favor of the great than authorized and formally approved by appropriate public institutions, he did not fail to meet their want, and to deliver, in beautiful verses, on the stage, what no man dared yet preach from the pulpit or the professor's chair. He made use of poetry as a means tc accomplish ends alien to its nature. Thus the artistic purity of his compositions was often impaired. As an example, it may be noted that the real aim of his *Mahomet* was to portray the dangers of fanaticism, or rather, indeed, of any belief in revelation. For this purpose he has most unjustifiably disfigured a great historical character, revoltingly loading him with frightful enormities, which rack and torture our feelings. Universally known, as he was, to be the bitter enemy of Christianity, he bethought himself of a new triumph for his vanity; in *Zaire* and *Alzire* he had recourse to Christian sentiments to excite emotion, and here, for once, his heart, which in its momentary transports, was susceptible of good feelings, overcame the rooted malice of his understanding; he succeeded, and these affecting religious passages cry out loudly against the slanderous levity of his petulant misrepresentations. Voltaire was never consistent, and least of all in his dramas, scoffing

at a religion whose sentiments he did not hesitate to use for dramatic effect.

Changes Due to Voltaire.

In England Voltaire had acquired a knowledge of a free constitution and became an enthusiastic admirer of liberty. Corneille had introduced Roman republicanism and general politics into his works, for the sake of their poetical energy. Voltaire again exhibited them under a poetical form, because of the political effect he thought them calculated to produce on popular opinion. As he fancied, he was better acquainted with the Greeks than his predecessors, and as he had obtained a slight knowledge of the English theatre and Shakespeare, which were then unknown to France, he wished in like manner to use them to his own advantage. He insisted on the earnestness, the severity and the simplicity of the Greek dramatic representation, and so far, at least, approached them as to exclude love from various subjects to which it did not properly belong. He was desirous of reviving the majesty of the Grecian scenery, and here his endeavors had, at least, the effect that in theatrical representation, the eye was no longer so utterly neglected as it had been. He borrowed from Shakespeare, as he thought, bold strokes of theatrical effect; but in this he was not successful; for when, in imitation of that great master, he ventured in *Semiramis* to call up a ghost from the lower world, he fell into innumerable absurdities. In a word, he was perpetually making experiments with dramatic art, con-

stantly availing himself of some new device. Many of his works seem to have stopped half way between studies and finished productions; for there is a trace of something unsettled and incomplete in his whole mental formation. Corneille and Racine, within the limits which they set themselves, are much more perfect; they are altogether that which they are, and we have no glimpses in their works of any supposed higher object beyond them. Voltaire's pretensions are much more extensive than his means. Corneille has expressed the maxims of heroism with greater sublimity, and Racine the natural emotions with a sweeter gracefulness; while Voltaire, it must be allowed, has employed the moral motives with greater effect, and displayed a more intimate acquaintance with the primary and fundamental principles of the human mind.

Voltaire's Treatment of the Unities.

What was this great dramatic critic's actual practice in regard to the unities of time and place, which are so prominent in the canons of the French drama? It must be acknowledged that, while sturdily professing to observe their spirit, he did not hesitate to infringe on their strict rules. He tried to adapt them to modern conditions, though often with very confused ideas of propriety. In his *Semiramis* he attempted to carry the rules into practice, and yet succeeded only in producing utter absurdity. Instead of allowing the persons to proceed to various places, he actually preserves unity of place by bringing the places to the persons. In the third

act the scene is a cabinet, and to use Voltaire's own words, "this cabinet, with the queen still within it, is suddenly transformed into a grand salon, magnificently furnished." The mausoleum of Ninus, also, which at first stands in an open place before the palace, opposite the temple of the Magi, manages to steal to the side of the throne in the centre of the hall. After yielding the spirit of the departed monarch to the light of day, to the terror of many beholders, the tomb receives it back, and in the following act returns to its old place, where it has left its obelisks behind. The effect had been further impaired by the custom of giving seats on both sides of the stage to distinguished personages, sometimes leaving a space barely ten feet wide for the movements of the actors.

Voltaire's Reforms.

As the action of Greek tragedies was always carried on in open places, surrounded by the abode or symbols of majesty, the French poets modified their materials to the manners of modern courts. Within the walls of a princely palace, no display of strong emotion, no breach of social etiquette was permitted; and as these are inseparable from tragedy, every bold deed, every act of violence, everything startling and calculated strongly to impress the senses, must be transacted behind the scenes, and related merely by messengers or confidants. Voltaire was fully conscious of the injury to dramatic effect sustained by this established custom of the tragic stage. Herein was one of his reforms; for he represented many things upon the stage which be-

fore would have been considered as unsuitable, if not ridiculous. Decorations also were greatly enriched and in better taste, the fripperies of Louis Quatorze fashion following the fops who had so long encumbered the scenes.

In other respects too close an observance of Greek rules, while the drama was under an entire change of conditions, had given rise to many incongruities. While the scene was not changed, things which could not happen in the same place were made to follow each other. What could be more improbable, for example, than that conspirators should confide their secrets to one another in a place where they knew their enemies were close at hand, or that plots against a sovereign should be hatched in his own antechamber? Unfortunately, Voltaire was too late to effect the complete revolution which he had projected; for much had already been ruined by the trammels of the drama and the prejudice in favor of external rules and proprieties.

As French tragedy had been developed from the time of Richelieu, so far from combining poetic form with nature and truth, it seemed to place us in the atmosphere of a court, as though this were essential to the existence of human nature. In real tragedy men are either matched with men in fearful strife, or set in close struggle with misfortune, and we can only exact from them an ideal dignity, without requiring the nice observance of social punctilios. The deepest emotions cannot be reached; for the poet must not exhibit human nature in all its repulsive nakedness. The most heart-rending pictures must still possess a certain beauty and

dignity beyond the realities of actual life, and it is precisely this beauty which is demanded in a French tragedy, however incompatible with perfect truth of expression.

A serious drawback lies in the national tendency of the Frenchman always to exhibit himself to the greatest possible advantage, and never to forget himself in the presence of others. In French tragedy the author protrudes too much of his own individuality into the discourses of his various personages, communicating to them his own reflections and his desire to shine on all occasions. When tragical speeches are closely examined, they are rarely found to be such as would be delivered by persons speaking or acting by themselves, apart from all restraint. We never overhear them in their unguarded moments, when they imagine themselves alone, and throw aside all care and reserve

Eloquence.

Eloquence is, of course, perfectly in place in tragedy, but only when the speaker is perfectly master of himself; since for overpowering passion an unconscious and involuntary eloquence alone is suitable. The truly inspired orator always forgets himself in his subject, and when he thinks less of his subject than of himself, and of the art of which he is a master, his oratory degenerates into rhetoric. Of rhetoric in court dress we have altogether too much in French tragedies, and in none more so than in the works of Pierre Corneille. Whenever a tragic hero can express his pain in antithesis and

allusion, we may reserve our pity, for we can be sure his sufferings have not reached the inmost heart. It is on account of this parade in situations which call for complete self-forgetfulness that Schiller has compared the heroes in French tragedy to the kings in old engravings, who lie in bed, crown, sceptre, robes and all.

Voltaire's Dread of Ridicule.

The social refinement which prevails in all French literature and art sharpens the sense of the ludicrous, which carried to excess, as in Paris, is the death of all enthusiasm. The fear of ridicule is the conscience of French poets; it has clipped their wings and impaired their flight; for it is always in the serious kinds of poetry that this fear torments them most. Extremes run into one another, and whenever pathos fails it is sure to give rise to laughter and parody. Corneille was not thus afflicted, for the Parisians of his time had not the wit of the moderns. Racine, with his natural refinement and moderation, was fairly guarded against the danger; but it is pitiful to witness the agony of Voltaire when threatened with a parody of his *Semiramis*. In a petition to the queen, this man, whose whole life had been passed in turning into ridicule everything great and venerable, urges his position as one of the servants of the king's household as a ground for obtaining from high authority the prohibition of a perfectly innocent and legitimate source of amusement. Since French wits have so long indulged themselves with turning into ridicule all things on earth, and especially the mental pro-

ductions of other nations, it is but fair that we should divert ourselves at the expense of their tragic writers, when they have now and then split on the rock of which they were themselves most in dread.

Preliminary Expositions.

The expositions or statements of the preliminary situation of things were another fault of the Parisian stage. They generally consist of choicely worded disclosures to the confidants, delivered in a happy moment of leisure. The very public whose impatience keeps the poets and players under such strict discipline has patience enough to listen to the prolix unfolding of what ought to be sensibly developed before their eyes. It is allowed that an exposition is seldom unexceptionable; that in their speeches the persons usually begin further back than they should, and that they tell one another what they must both have known before.

The whole system of exposition, both in tragedy and high comedy, is exceedingly erroneous. Nothing can be more ill-judged than to begin at once to instruct us without any dramatic movement. At the first drawing up of the curtain the spectator's attention is almost unavoidably distracted by external circumstances, his interest has not yet been excited, and this is precisely the time chosen by the poet to require his undivided attention to a dry explanation—a demand which he can hardly be ready to meet. It may be urged that the same thing was done by the Greek poets. But with them the subject was for the most part extremely sim-

ple, and already known to the spectators; and their expositions, with the exception of the unskillful prologues of Euripides, have not the didactic particularizing tone of the French, but are full of life and motion. How admirable, again, are the expositions of Shakespeare and Calderon! At the very outset they lay hold of the imagination, and when they have once gained the spectator's interest and sympathy, they then bring forward the information necessary for the full understanding of the implied transactions.

To sum up in a few words, the French have endeavored to form their tragedy according to a strict idea; but instead of this they have set up merely an abstract notion. They require tragical dignity and grandeur, tragical situations, passions and pathos, altogether simple and pure, and without any foreign appendages. Stripped of their proper investiture, they lose much in truth, profundity and character; and the whole composition is deprived of the living charm of variety, of the magic of picturesque situations, and of all those pleasing effects which a light but preparatory matter, when left to itself, often produces on the mind by its spontaneous growth.

The Influence of Voltaire.

The great literary despot of the eighteenth century claimed that his dramatic reforms and innovations had imparted new vitality to French tragedy. He even succeeded in convincing his contemporaries of the justice of such claims. Yet, in fact, he made no essential im-

provement in the art; rather, indeed, he increased the tendency to mere declamation, which is fatal to the highest drama. The leading ideas in his plays are political or social; they abound in invectives against tyranny and exposure to fanaticism. It is true that his genius was in no way circumscribed by national prejudice in regard to the subjects treated. He took his themes from a very wide historical and geographical range—from the New World as well as the Old, from Egypt and China, from the Crusades or ancient Roman and Greek history as well as from French annals. He crossed the Channel and borrowed from Shakespeare, and deliberately attempted to improve him, besides pointing out his supposed faults in critical essays. But where French tragedy was really weak—that is, in presentation of character—Voltaire made no improvement. He never rose to the force and passion of Corneille; he never equalled Racine in grace. In spite of the searching criticism of two centuries, these two masters still hold the foremost place in the French theatre, while the dramatic works of Voltaire have been almost consigned to oblivion.

V.

Voltaire's Contemporaries.

In Voltaire's long literary career he was an interpreter and to some extent the guide and director of the general movement of the French mind. In its early part he was merely a man of letters delighting in the exuberance of his powers, treating airily or seriously themes suggested by the course of events. In its latter part, roused by the hostility, open and covert, with which he was surrounded and tormented, he became more distinctly a social critic and reformer, using his unmatched powers of literary expression to promote his ends, sometimes selfish, but just as often humanitarian. Above all, his work was a warfare against intolerance and in behalf of free thoughts. He had numerous literary followers and imitators, and a few real, with many would-be rivals.

Crébillon.

In the dramatic field Crébillon was Voltaire's most prominent rival; yet, though he confined his efforts to this single department, he did not attain this position until well advanced in life, and then rather through

the ardor of the enemies of the great skeptic than through the real merit of his own productions.

Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon was twenty years older than Voltaire, having been born in 1674 at Dijon, where his father was a notary royal. He was educated at the Collège Mazarin, and being destined for the bar, was placed in an attorney's office at Paris. But his preceptor, who had been a friend of Scarron, urged the young man, who had a turn for rhyming, to try the theatre. His first tragedy on the death of the sons of Brutus was not brought out, but his second, *Idomenée*, presented in 1705, had sufficient success to encourage him to proceed. His *Atrée et Thyeste* was repeatedly acted at court, and in 1711 he produced his masterpiece, *Rhadamiste et Zenobie*. But later ventures were failures. He was poor and met with various misfortunes, which soured his spirit without diminishing his pride and self-conceit. His enthusiasm for ancient republicanism might have given him a prominent place in a revolutionary era, but it was a clog to him in monarchical France. Having lost his wife, he removed with his infant son to a garret, where he shared his home with cats and dogs, and solaced himself as best he could. Yet he had some ardent partisans, and there came a turn in his fortunes when, in 1731, he secured election to the Academy. Madame de Pompadour, in her enmity to Voltaire, favored Crébillon's ambition. He obtained a position in the royal library and a pension. In 1748 his *Catilina* was played before the court with great success. His last play, *Le Triumvirat*, was presented in 1754. His life was prolonged till his eighty-eighth year.

So fierce was Voltaire's jealousy that he took the subjects of no less than five of Crébillon's tragedies for dramas of his own. Crébillon was noted for vigor and passion, but his lack of culture was manifested in his best plays. Far from contributing to the purification of the tragic art, as his friends claimed, he followed in the footsteps of the more affected writers of his age. His favorite books were the antiquated romances of Calprenède and similar writers, and from them he derived his extravagant plots. Though his talents were suited only for tragedy, they were not sufficient for its loftiest flights. He was at his best in poetic depictions of terror, and was, therefore, called "the terrible," but good taste would condemn him as sensational, both in action and diction. He painted passion more than character and situation more than passion.

Crébillon's Electre.

The *Electre* of Crébillon appeared in 1708. It has undoubtedly great defects; the author did not attempt to retain the ancient simplicity; he introduces false and insipid elements—the double love of the children of Ægisthus and Agamemnon—into the most tragic subject in the world. But *Electre* has also its beauties; for instance, the dream of Cyltemnestra:

Twice I awoke from distressing slumber—for the third time my senses sunk in sleep—when I thought that I felt myself dragged, amid terrible and mournful cries, into the horror of darkness. I followed, in spite of myself, these doleful shrieks. I cannot tell what remorse agitated my mind. A

thousand thunders roared in a thick cloud, which, however, appeared to yield to me a passage. Under my wavering steps a gulf was opened, and the frightful abode of the dead was presented to my eyes. Across Acheron the unhappy Electra, at a great pace, seemed to guide a spectre to the place where I was. I fled—it followed me. Ah! my lord, at that name my blood freezes. Alas! it was Agamemnon. "Stop," he said to me with a fearful voice, "this is the dreadful termination of thy crimes! Stop, unworthy spouse, and shudder at that blood which the cruel Ægisthus drew from my side!" That blood, which streamed from a large wound, appeared, as it flowed, to send forth a long murmur. On the instant I thought I saw mine run also; but, wretch that I am, scarcely did it touch his when I saw spring from it a pitiless monster, which first darted at me a frightful look. Twice the Styx, struck by its bellowings, answered with prolonged groans.

The meeting of Orestes and Electra is full of fire; the part of Palamedes, entirely the invention of Crébillon, is powerfully conceived and executed, and the remorse of Orestes forms an admirable passage, somewhat in the style of Racine in *Andromaque*. We meet there with a stroke of genius; Orestes lets his own name escape his lips, and, in his fearful trouble, takes it for a voice that came from hell:

But how! what vapor now obscures the air? Thanks to heaven, the road to hell is open, let us descend; hell has nothing to frighten me; let us follow the dark path which destiny presents to me; let us conceal ourselves in the horrors of eternal night. What a mournful brightness at this moment lights my way! Who brings day into these gloomy retreats? What do I see—my look frightens the spirits of the dead! What groanings! what doleful cries! Orestes! Who calls me in this horrid abode—Ægisthus? Ah! it is too much; . . . What do I see? in his hands my mother's head! What looks! whither shall I flee? Ah! furious monster, what a spectacle dost thou dare present to my eyes! Cruel monster, stop! take

this head away from my eyes, overwhelmed with terror! Ah! my mother, spare your unhappy son! Shade of Agamemnon, listen to my cries! I implore thy aid, dear shade of my father! Come, defend thy son from his mother's fury! Take pity on the condition to which thou seest me reduced! What! the barbarous woman follows me, even into thy arms! It is done; I yield to this frightful punishment.

Rhadamiste.

Rhadamiste is much superior to the other works of Crébillon. Had this tragedy been better written, it would have occupied a foremost rank on the French stage. Yet something is always wanting to it, and especially good sense—not precisely on the stage, but in the distribution of the piece. Aristotle allows absurdity in the events previous to the action of the play; Crébillon has made large use of this permission. Nothing can be more absurd than the facts related in the explanation, which is made twice over, in the first and second acts, always in a dull, complicated and confused manner. But the points of interest which result from these painful antecedents are worthy of note. Rhadamistus thus discourses to his confidant, Hieron:

And what do I know, Hieron? Furious, wavering, a criminal without inclination, and virtuous without intention—unfortunate sport of my extreme grief—in my present condition do I know myself? My heart, incessantly assailed by different cares, and an enemy of crime, without loving virtue—deplorable victim of an unfortunate love—is abandoned to remorse without renouncing crime. I yield to repentance, but without profiting by it, and my self-knowledge leads me only to detest myself. Do I know what draws me into this cruel abode—is it despair, or love, or hatred? I have lost Zenobia: after that

horrid blow, can you still ask me what I wish? Desperate, proscribed, abhorring the light, I would wish to avenge myself on all nature! I know not what poison pervades my heart, but, even in my remorse, everything there becomes fury.

The dialogue between Pharasmenes and his son, Rhadamistus, who, without making himself known, is presented as ambassador of the Romans, is admirable. The energy of the style and the power of fancy are suitable to the thought. Still better is the meeting of Rhadamistus and his wife Zenobia, whom he thought he had sacrificed, the latter exclaiming:

Ah! cruel one! would that thy hostile hand had never attempted any other life than that of Zenobia! With my heart divested of anger by thy look, I would make it my happiness to see my husband again, and love, honored by thy jealous fury, would have placed thy wife in thy arms. Think not, however, that I can look on thee with enmity or without pity. . . . Go, it is not to us that the gods have committed the power of punishing enemies so dear. Mention to me the country where thou wishest to live. Speak! from this moment I am ready to follow thee, assured that the remorse, which has taken possession of thy heart, springs from thy virtue more than from thy misfortune. Happy, if the cares of Zenobia for thee might one day serve as an example to Armenia—to render the people like me submissive to thee, and, at least, to instruct them how to discharge their duty. . . . Calm the vain suspicions which have arisen in thy mind, or conceal, at least, from me thy unworthy jealousy—remember that a heart which can pardon thee cannot be suspected without a crime.

Rhadamistus, overwhelmed with this generosity, exclaims: "Ye gods, you have restored her to me, fulfill

my desires and condescend to make my heart worthy of your benefits."

In the fourth act, forced by the jealousy of Rhadamistus, Zenobia, in the presence of his brother Arsaames, confesses her feelings in favor of the latter, which she had concealed till then: "But since thou wishest to give thyself up to thy suspicions, know then all in this heart, which thou canst suspect; I am about by a single stroke to make thee acquainted with it, and afterward leave thee master of my destiny. Thy brother was dear to me, I cannot deny it; nay, I do not even seek to justify it; but in spite of his love, that prince, who was ignorant of my partiality, would not yet have known it, but for thy ungenerous suspicions." She concludes, as she turns away: "I know the rage of thy jealous suspicions, but I have too much virtue to be afraid of my husband."

Pyrrhus.

Crébillon's *Pyrrhus* was esteemed below its real value. The subject is interesting and extremely probable; its structure is skillful and yet simple, the characters are noble and interesting. Here we find some traces of Corneille—the exhibition of generosity in youthful hearts—a trait of nature, which both poets knew how to represent. Although this play is better written than the rest, it still wants the charm of style which might have secured for it enduring reputation; for Crébillon, with all his art, was faulty in style, and this was an unpardonable fault to audiences accustomed to the polished versification of Corneille, Racine and

Voltaire. Crébillon forgot that he wrote for a nation of artists.

Crébillon and Voltaire.

To bring Crébillon into competition with Voltaire a cabal was organized, whose purpose, however unjust, was certainly less so than that which placed Pradon in opposition to Racine. In certain respects, indeed, the comparison may have been justified; but Crébillon's productions unquestionably exhibit his inferiority. Voltaire felt the opposition too keenly. He was irritated; he showed some littleness of mind, and set himself to prove that on all subjects he was superior to Crébillon. The latter was personally a stranger to the exertions of the anti-Voltairean party, and his reputation suffered from their endeavors to make him the equal of Voltaire. The usurpation of the place which they assigned to him has caused him to be more severely judged and more heavily censured.

Thomas Corneille.

Among the poets of this period a word may here be added as to the younger Corneille, who did not seek, like his brother, to excite astonishment by pictures of heroism so much as to win the favor of the spectators by touches of tenderness. Of his numerous tragedies two only, the *Comte d'Essex* and *Ariadne*, kept possession of the stage; the rest were consigned to oblivion. In the latter of the two, composed after the model of *Bérénice*, the catastrophe may be said to consist in a

swoon. The situation of the resigned and enamored Ariadne, who, after all her sacrifices, sees herself abandoned by Theseus and betrayed by her own sister, is expressed with great truth of feeling. Whenever an actress of an engaging figure, and with a sweet voice, appeared in this character, she was sure to excite interest. The other parts, the cold and deceitful Theseus, the intriguing Phædra, who continues to the last her deception of her confiding sister, the panderer Pirithous, and King Œnarus, who instantly offers himself in the place of the faithless lover, are all pitiful in the extreme. Moreover, the desert rocks of Naxos are here smoothed down to modern drawing-rooms, and the princes who people them, with all the observances of politeness, seek to outwit each other or to beguile the unfortunate princess, who alone retains anything like pretensions to nature.

Thomas Corneille made the same mistake as did his more gifted brother; he remained on the stage longer than he was wanted, until his audiences, becoming weary of his works, first yawned over them and then began to hiss them. True, he must write for bread, but even here he made a mistake; for he would have earned more in some humble capacity than by his ambitious pieces.

Fontenelle.

Bernard le Boier Fontenelle is one of the few centenarians of historical note. Born at Rouen in 1657, he became the favorite nephew of Corneille, who encouraged his dramatic efforts. Yet he was not really a

dramatist, but merely wrote a few plays among a multitude of other works. Fontenelle outlived nearly all the most famous men of the classical and the Voltairean age. He continued to influence men by his conversation long after he had ceased to write. The glory of his illustrious uncle had filled him with poetic enthusiasm, so that, at fourteen, he began to write poetry, and it was not until he was five-and-thirty that he abandoned attempts, to which the Muse had never been auspicious. Fontenelle wrote several dreary operas, though his *Thetis* and *Peleus* were for a time successful. He also wrote sonnets and pastorals, for the latter of which he had not the requisite simplicity, frankness and sincerity. His shepherds do no thinking nor anything else except make love of a rather metaphysical sort. As to his tragedies, they exhibit neither sensibility nor warmth of art, and hence resulted in failure. In the scientific and philosophical works on which his fame entirely rests, Fontenelle remained faithful to the system of Descartes. These, with his eulogies and sketches of manners, his pointed anecdotes and observations, couched in neat terse sentences, have maintained his fame.

La Motte.

Among the nearest friends of Fontenelle was Antoine Houdard de la Motte, blind from his childhood, and from early youth consigned exclusively to the domain of literature. Contrary to the usual fate of literary men, he was generally beloved, and so deserved to be, for the gentleness and amenity of his char-

acter, concerning which some delightful traits are mentioned.

La Motte's mind was ingenuous and natural, but was somewhat lacking in sensibility. The strongest feature in his writings is their good sense, and his defect or weakness was that he ascribed too much to it, believing that good sense, the basis of genius, was genius itself, and that it might be sufficient to make good and even beautiful verses. He passed his life in self-contradiction—he wrote thousands of verses, but did not believe in poetry; he translated and abridged Homer, but did not believe in the ancients; he wanted imagination, and wrote odes. The explanation is that he possessed a dual nature—that of the critic and that of the poet. In the latter character he attempted all kinds of poetry—tragedies, comedies, operas, eclogues, odes, fables and translations in verse.

The tragedies of La Motte are: *Les Machabées, Romulas, Œdipe* and *Inés de Castro.* All were very successful, but the last more than the others. *Inés,* the masterpiece of La Motte, was more exposed to criticism than *Les Machabées,* and belongs to the small number of tragedies of the second order which have not become extinct. This is rare, for we possess many tragedies of the second order which are still quoted, but no longer read. *Inés* has preserved all its freshness; and if it had the charm of fancy and vigor of style, would be reckoned among the masterpieces of the stage. Its subject is admirable, and La Motte has altered the story of Camoens very happily, by introducing the generous character of Constance. The conduct of the action is

easy; the characters are true, noble, natural and without affectation; the subject is eminently tragical. There is nothing odious but the character of the queen, who puts Inés to death by poison; and the author has banished her to the second place. All is beautiful and simple; there are even some bold innovations, among others the introduction of the children of Inés, who succeed in persuading the king.

The play is not eloquently written, and that is its principal defect, but it abounds in admirable verses, which the heart alone can furnish, and which all the intellect in the world could not inspire. Such, for instance, are the lines which Inés addresses to king Alphonso, as she presents to him her children: "Regard both with a compassionate eye; see in them not my blood, but only yours. Pour out on me alone the severity of your anger, but conceal for some time my fate from my husband." Don Pedro says to Inés: "Do not disown, Inés, that I love you." The dying Inés addresses Don Pedro: "Console your father, but do not forget how dear I was to you."

In scene second of the second act Alphonso addresses his son with nobleness, truth and a kind of eloquence:

Your rage is no rule for me; you speak as a soldier—I must act as a king. What is, then, the heir that I leave to my empire? An audacious young man, whose heart is only eager for bloody battles and unjust schemes, and ready to count as nothing the blood of his subjects! I pity Portugal for the evils which the barbarous ambition of this unbridled heart is preparing for her. Is it for conquests that Heaven made kings? Would it, then, have only placed the people under our laws, that at our will foolish tyranny should dare with impunity to

sport with their life? Ah! judge better of the throne, and know, my son, by what sacred title we are seated there. Wise trustees of our subjects' blood, we are not so much their masters as their fathers. At the peril of our lives we must render them happy, and neither conclude peace nor engage in war but for them, and know no honor but in their advantage; and when in its excess our blind courage exposes their destiny for an unrighteous glory, we show ourselves less their kings than their assassins. Think of it when my death, every day drawing nearer, shall put in your hands the dignity of sovereign—remember these duties and fulfill them. At present, Don Pedro, as my subject, obey.

As to the operas of La Motte, the mode of writing once admitted, *Issé* deserves most praise; it is truly original, but the others are of little value.

After the tragedy of *Inés*, it is for his fables that La Motte is still esteemed. They are ingenious, and to the merit of having invented their subjects is added that of having treated them agreeably. It has been justly remarked that the gift of invention, which has often been wanting in very great men, has sometimes been the inheritance of talents of an inferior order. But when La Motte attempted to imitate the simplicity of La Fontaine, he completely failed. His animals neither speak the language of men, nor that which imagination might lend to brutes; they use such words as made J. B. Rousseau declare that an ass expresses himself in these fables like a member of the Academy.

Decadence of Classical Tragedy.

The ramifications of the tragic art of France in its decline need not be further pursued in detail. Among

the contemporaries of Voltaire such names may only be mentioned as Saurin, his imitator, or De Belloy, Saurin's rival. In the latter part of the eighteenth century French tragedy was dying a slow death, however numerous might be the leaves which sprouted from the decaying tree. Its form had been permanently fixed, and even Shakespeare, as treated by Ducis, whose tastes were better than his times, could not effect a change.

Shakespeare on the French Stage.

It cannot be said that the works of Shakespeare have ever become naturalized on the Parisian stage. To say nothing of the difficulties of translation, there is in them little of French manners, French character or of the tastes and genius of the French. The men and women of Shakespeare do not talk and think and act; they do not make love; they do not hate; they do not even eat and drink, as do the heroes and heroines of the French stage. In a word the French have little in common with the English, for though near neighbors, there is between them a sea more formidable than the natural boundary—a gulf as wide as that which separated the Athenians from the Spartans. Then, as to translation, the obstacles are almost insuperable, and the more so that one is a Romance and the other a Teutonic language. How, for instance, would a Frenchman set about translating the great soliloquy beginning "To be, or not to be?" About the best he could do with it would be Être ou ne pas être? and this surely does not convey to us the inner meaning of the original.

VI

Post-Voltairean Drama.

The influences under which classical tragedy became an historical monument rather than a living institution, extended also to French comedy. Here they produced a wide variety and luxuriance of growth, such as no other nation has witnessed. Of many of these the germs are to be found in the works of Molière, the most versatile and brilliant writer of comedy the world has known. Scanty, indeed, were the materials on which Molière built his long series of masterpieces. All that he found in existence was the comedy of intrigue founded on Spanish or Italian examples, and the elements of a comedy of character, partly in French but more in Italian farce and ballet-pantomime. Corneille's *Menteur*, as he relates, pointed out to him the way to a fuller combination of character with intrigue, and in this direction Molière's genius found its fullest development.

Molière's Influence on Comedy.

But a man like Molière can only be judged in his relations to the annals of comedy at large. In Molière we

have both a severe satirist and a kindly humorist. Performing often before the court of Louis XIV, at times he displayed the sentiments of a loyal courtier, and again the gay spirit of opposition almost indispensable to a popular wit. But it is not at court that he appears at his best. His comedies contain elaborate and tender pictures of human character in its perpetual types, and the liveliest sketches of social follies and literary extravagances, coupled occasionally with broad appeals to vulgar merriment. Light and perspicuous in construction, he is master of the delicate play of irony, the penetrating force of wit and the abandon of frolicsome gayety. His style, moulded by a true sense of humor, adapts itself to every phase of comic situation. His morality is far from rigid, yet his works are as free from prurience as they are from pretense. Though without any trace of the didactic element, which is fatal to true dramatic art, the services he rendered to the drama were also services to society, concerning which his comedies told the truth, however unpalatable that truth at times might be.

If the mantle of Molière can be said to have fallen upon any of his contemporaries or successors, this honor must be ascribed to Regnard, who imitated the great master, both in themes and characters, while the ingenuity of his plots and the gayety of his treatment, even of selfish temptings into the by-paths of sentimental comedy, entitled him to be regarded as a comic poet of original genius. Original he certainly was, though not always so in his plots; but, while faulty as to style and versification, he had a thorough

grasp of comic situation and an amusing facility in dialogue, often leading him into farce.

Le Sage.

Alain René Le Sage, the author of *Gil Blas*, passed his life amid hard toil, obscurity and poverty. He wrote much for the little theatres, especially for that of La Foire, for which he produced more than a hundred comedies, or rather, farces. He was neglected by the great and by the government, and severely pursued by Voltaire and other critics, who unjustly accused him of plagiarism from Spanish sources. He died in 1747, in the eightieth year of his age, at the home of his son in Boulogne.

The romances of Le Sage were of a new kind. Though he wrote several, *Gil Blas* and the *Devil on Two Sticks* are the only ones generally known. At the time when some were attempting to put romance into comedy, Le Sage put comedy into romance. His is the true comic romance; that of Scarron, which bears its title, is only a series of burlesque scenes pleasantly related; *Gil Blas* is "an ample comedy with a hundred different acts." In general, the romance is a little epic poem—the history of a short period in a man's life, but here the epic embraces a whole life, it is a series of episodes, the memoirs of an adventurer. Le Sage did not apply himself to any other mode of writing; this was sufficient for him, and perhaps the romance reduced to unity, and with an intricate plot, was not suited to his natural talent.

The subjects treated by Le Sage require caution; his pen is as chaste as his subjects are unfortunately the reverse. In modern romances, as a rule, the more dangerous the subject the more is the danger increased by the mode of expression. Le Sage, on the contrary, remains cool, where he might have attempted to be vehement. He treats grave subjects with irony, and makes his readers laugh at wickedness, but not sympathize with it.

Le Sage does not excel less in dialogue than in narrative. *Gil Blas* belongs to the style of comedy, not merely in the main subject of the book, but still more in its form. Several chapters are real scenes, in which nothing would be found wanting for theatrical success. Accordingly, no one is surprised that Le Sage has written some good comedies, such as *Turcaret* and *Crispin, His Master's Rival.*

Crispin is rather a farce than a comedy, for this style of writing was scarcely otherwise understood, while applause uniformly followed the triumph of audacious knavery. For comic fancy, lively action, and originality, the play deserves to be classed among the best of its kind.

Turcaret is at the head of comedies of the second order. A severe satire on the baseness, cupidity, stupid pride and moral obtuseness of the farmers of the revenues, the financiers of the age, the play might seem to belong to the time of John Law, whom, however, it preceded by several years. Turcaret is a financier, a weak knave, duped and robbed by a baroness, who was an ingenious cheat. The valet and chambermaid are

worse than those whom they serve. There is not an honest person in it—they are all the very dregs of society. It cannot, therefore, produce much interest; but the originality of the thoughts and the fidelity of the character give to this comedy unquestionable merit.

Sentimental Comedy.

In the eighteenth century comedy became more distinctly sentimental. *La Pupille*, for instance, a pretty comedy by Fagan, first played in 1734, is one of the pieces that mark the transition. An orphan is attached to her guardian, and ends by marrying him, after having rejected various offers made through the generous guardian, who was ignorant of the affection of his charge. This was new at the time, though not specially ingenious. Moreover, comedy becomes more probable. It is less ideal, and therefore less poetical; we may add that it is less taken up with the classes of society. The comic writers of the seventeenth century particularly attacked these different classes, and whatever was peculiarly ridiculous in the members of whom they were constituted—physicians, citizens, courtiers, marquises, even those devoted to religion—for *Tartuffe* is not only a satire on hypocrisy, but on a dominant party of the time. A little later, the nobility were ridiculed, the lawyers, the magistrates, and then the farmer of the revenues, who fattened on the substance of the people, and was whitewashed by an alliance with some noble lady without fortune. But, in the eighteenth century writers are rarely concerned with classes;

they aim at character and point at the ridicule connected with humanity itself, rather than at a particular condition. The grand age, deprived of the liberty of the press, was partly redeemed by the liberty of the pulpit, which was extensively used, and by the liberty of the comic theatre. In these two quarters, so commonly hostile to each other, was the twofold refuge of French liberty. But under Louis XV, the press began to be emancipated, manners became free and comedy lost the office which it had filled in the preceding generation. It is less political; it becomes more moral.

Legrand.

Legrand, a contemporary of Regnard, was one of the first comic poets who gained celebrity for afterpieces in verse, a species of composition in which the French have since produced a vast number of elegant trifles. He has not, however, risen to anything like the same height of posthumous fame as Regnard. His *King of Lubberland* is a sprightly farce of the marvellous style, overflowing with a native fanciful wit, animated by lively mirth. It is an ingenious piece of folly, an example of the manner in which a similar play of Aristophanes might be brought on the stage without exciting disgust, and without personal satire. Yet Legrand was entirely unacquainted with the comedy of the Athenians, and it was solely his own genius that led him to the invention. The execution is as careful as in a regular comedy; but to this title, in the French opinion, it can have no pretensions, because of the wonderful

world which it represents, because of the decorations, and of the music here and there introduced.

Spirit of French Comedy.

The eighteenth century produced in France a number of comic writers of the second and third rank, but no distinguished genius capable of advancing the art a step further, in consequence of which the belief in Molière's unapproachable excellence has become still more firmly riveted. A few observations on the general spirit of French comedy may here precede further notice of its writers.

The want of easy progress and over-lengthy disquisitions in stationary dialogue have characterized more or less nearly every writer since the time of Molière, on whose regular pieces also the conventional rules applicable to tragedy had an indisputable influence. French comedy in verse has its tirades, as well as tragedy, and it has the additional drawback of a certain degree of stately etiquette. The comedy of other nations has usually, from motives which are easily understood, descended into the circle of the lower classes; but French comedy is for the most part confined to the upper ranks of society. Here, then, we trace the influence of the court as the central point of the whole national vanity. Those spectators who in reality have no access to the great world, were flattered by being surrounded on the stage with marquises and chevaliers, and while the poet satirized their fashionable follies, they endeavored to snatch something of that privileged tone which was so

much the object of envy. Society rubs off the salient angles of character; its amusement consists mainly in the pursuit of the ridiculous, and on the other hand it trains people in the faculty of being upon their guard against the observations of others. The natural, cordial and jovial comic features of the inferior classes is thrown aside, and instead of it another description, the fruit of polished society, is adopted, bearing in its insipidity the stamp of its purposeless way of living.

The object of these comedies is no longer real life, but society, that perpetual negotiation between conflicting vanities which never ends in a sincere treaty of peace. The insipid uniformity of these pictures was unfortunately too often seasoned by the corruption of moral principles which, under the regency of Louis XV, it became the fashion openly to avow. The gallant who in the tone of satiety boasts of the multitude of his conquests too easily won, was not a character invented by comic writers, but a portrait accurately taken from real life, as is proved by the numerous memoirs of the period.

Even if, in the constant ridicule of marriage by the petit-maitres, and in their moral skepticism especially with regard to female virtue, it was the intention of the poets to ridicule a prevailing depravity, the picture is not on that account the less immoral. The great or fashionable world, which in point of numbers is the little world, and yet considers itself alone of importance, can hardly be improved by it; and for the other classes the example is but too seductive, from the brilliancy with which the characters are surrounded. The French

comedy of this age would not deal with the low or middle classes, which were considered as altogether beneath the dignity of its art.

Destouches.

While too many comic writers may be charged with fostering immorality, there are some conspicuous exceptions, especially Destouches and Marivaux, fruitful or at least diligent playwrights, the former in verse and the latter in prose. They acquired considerable distinction among their contemporaries, but on the stage few of their works survived either of them. Destouches was a mediocre, tame and well-meaning author, who applied himself with his utmost powers to the composition of regular five-act comedies, in which there is little or nothing laughable. He was in no danger of falling from the dignified tone of the supposed high comic into the familiarity of farce, which the French hold in such contempt. With moderate talents, without humor, and almost without vivacity, neither ingenious in invention nor possessed of real insight into the human mind and human affairs, he has in some of his productions, as *Le Glorieux, Le Philosophe Marié,* and especially *L'Indecis,* shown with great credit to himself what true and unpretending diligence is capable of effecting. Other pieces, as *L'Ingrat* and *L'Homme Singulier,* are complete failures, and enable us to see that a poet who considers *Tartuffe* and *The Misanthrope* as the highest objects of imitation, has only another step to take to lose sight of the comic art altogether. These two works of Mo-

lière have not been friendly beacons to his followers, but false lights to their ruin.

Born at Tours in 1680 Philippe Néricault Destouches was descended from an honorable and wealthy family. Thwarted in a youthful attachment, he left the paternal roof and joined a company of actors, who from city to city brought him to Soleure, in Switzerland, where the French ambassador at that time resided. There Destouches brought on the stage his first work, *Le Curieux Impertinent*, which was received with transport, and the suffrage of the audience was presently confirmed by its favorable reception on the French stage. This success gained for Destouches the notice of the ambassador, who, perceiving in him qualities far superior to the condition of a comedian, induced him to quit the theatre, and initiated him in diplomacy. The regent sent him to London, where he represented France for seven years, was married, and on his return to his own country lived in retirement, amusing his leisure hours with writing comedies. Voltaire called him "his dear Terence, his illustrious friend," and said of his *Glorieux*, perhaps the best of his plays: "Solid and ingenious author, master of the theatre, it will be in your power, who wrote the *Glorieux*, to be yourself glorious."

La Chaussée.

Pierre Claude Nivelle de La Chaussée, born in 1692 in the midst of opulence, cultivated letters from taste. His first work for the theatre appeared when he was nearly forty years of age. Destouches had introduced

the sentimental comedy; La Chaussée went a step farther, and published dramatic works in which sentiment constituted all the interest. His plays were tragi-comic. This innovation is not entirely the doing of La Chaussée, it belongs also to Voltaire. *L'Enfant Prodigue* appeared in 1736, and the principal works of La Chaussée are posterior to that date. Nevertheless, he is regarded as the founder of a very acceptable style of writing, to which he gave much consistency, by the number and success of his plays.

As to the meaning and origin of tragi-comedy, it may be remarked that on the stage, in the seventeenth century, the citizens were ridiculous, or held to be so. In the eighteenth century they acquired there an avowed importance. If citizens are represented, it is no longer that as citizens they may be derided; the nobility would rather be the object of ridicule, and it is this disposition which must lead to the comedy or tragedy of the citizens, that is, to tragi-comedy.

Moreover, prose is less exempt than poetry from external influence. Poetry aspires to the ideal; it lives by contemplation, and is little compromised by the choice of its subjects. The poet looks high and far, and makes his choice, and scarcely inquires about the immediate end of his art. An age which becomes more prosaic at once gains and loses by it; it loses by descending from the ideal, it gains by approaching the reality. Poetry falls back, and prose goes forward a step. The poetry of the seventeenth century has only itself in view; the poetry of the eighteenth, less truly poetical, aims at action. Comedy is the ideal of human

nature contemplated on the ridiculous side. Tragedy is its ideal, viewed on the side of disaster and passion. The tragi-comedy, an intermediate style, has less poetry than either.

La Chaussée was not a man of genius, although he was happy in invention and combination; he does not conceive powerfully, and does not search deeply into character. He wrote naturally; he has a great number of verses happily expressed, and yet his style has little power. It is soft like the mode of writing which he cultivated, and very different from that of Destouches, who has a style singularly bold.

La Chaussée's best plays are *Le Préjugé à la Mode*, *Mélanide*, and *La Gouvernante*. The two last are rather highly-wrought romances transferred to the stage. *Le Préjugé à la Mode* comes nearer to comedy; it is La Chaussée's masterpiece, although it is upon a subject which can no longer be very interesting. The prejudice which he describes is not now the fashion, and a man is no longer ashamed to be a good husband. Still there is more truth in the piece than in the *Married Philosopher* of Destouches, and there are some fine points which the author has the merit of inventing, but which are not sufficiently set off by the style. Nevertheless there is much of interest, as in the following lines: "I observe in the present day that it has no longer a good appearance to love a companion with whom you associate. This practice is only found among the citizens. But, besides, conjugal love has been made perfectly ridiculous. A husband at present dares no longer appear so. He must sacrifice to cruel prejudice the pleasures of a

lawful and mutual love. In vain is he attached to a wife who loves him; fashion subjects him in spite of himself, and soon reduces him to the necessity of passing from shame to unfaithfulness." This sort of tragi-comedy was cultivated, modified and defended by Voltaire, Saurin, Diderot, Beaumarchais and others.

Marivaux.

Pierre Caslet de Chamblain Marivaux is usually reckoned among the novelists rather than the dramatists of France. His romances were among the first that delineated real life and manners, and though full of false sentiments and written in affected style, they enjoyed great popularity. Voltaire admitted that Marivaux "knew the paths to the heart," but added that "he was ignorant of the high road." Perhaps Voltaire was prejudiced, as he was defeated by Marivaux when both were candidates for the Academy in 1743.

That Marivaux was a mannerist is so universally acknowledged in France that the peculiar term of "marivaudage" has been invented for his mannerism. But this is at least his own, and at first sight by no means unpleasing. Delicacy of mind cannot be denied to him; only it is coupled with a certain littleness. It is one of the most refined species of what may be called the comic of observation, when a peculiarity or property shows itself most conspicuously at the very time its possessor has the least suspicion of it, or is most studious to conceal it. Marivaux applied this to the passions; and naiveté in the involuntary disclosure of emotions

certainly belongs to the domain of comedy. But this naiveté is prepared by him with too much art; he appears too solicitous for our applause, and seems too well pleased with it himself. Marivaux's aim is observed from the very beginning, and all our attention is directed to discovering the way by which he is to lead us to it. This might be a skillful mode of composing, if it did not degenerate into the insignificant and the superficial. Marivaux has neither painted characters nor contrived intrigue. The whole plot generally turns on an unpronounced word, which is always at the tongue's end, and which is frequently kept back in rather an arbitrary manner. Nevertheless, he possessed a peculiar though a very limited view of the essence of comedy.

Although, perhaps, too much decried, it may still be said that the status of Marivaux has, in the main, been justly determined; all the critics agree about his excellencies and defects; those, however, who only know him from the opinions generally entertained, undervalue him, and if they become acquainted with his works, will probably find them much better than they expected.

Marivaux was a man of much wit, a delicate moralist and an acute observer. It may be added that, in reference to morality, he was one of the purest writers of his age. In this respect he is not only irreproachable but exalted. In his literary opinions he took part with the period in which he lived, but it was quite different in regard to his philosophical ideas, and he always showed respect for religion. His taste for minute ob-

servation injured, nay, ruined him as a writer. He is the spy of the human heart and the informer against it; he keeps always on its path, has his ear constantly at the key-hole, and his accusations or indiscretions are a kind of unravelling of the web, which may often appear trifling, but which destroys many threads of gold and silk.

To this taste for minute analysis he unites the habit of keeping up the delicacy of the thought by the contrast of a vulgar expression. It is a kind of coquetry analogous to that of Fontenelle. The latter wished to appear simple, Marivaux to appear familiar. Another fault is diffuseness. He seldom knows when to stop, and his exuberance sometimes generates into mere babble; his psychology is a sort of gossip applied, not to this and that individual, but to human nature.

Marivaux wrote several interesting comedies, full of the most amiable delicacy; but everybody in them, down to the footman, has a taste for minute observation. One of the best is named *La Surprise de l'Amour*, and this title would suit all of them; for we see in all a woman's heart surprised or insensibly assailed by a feeling to which it appears at first entirely averse. We observe with curiosity the successive transformations of this germ; we discover a singular mixture of artlessness and hypocrisy in a tender heart, and see it contributing to the deception which is attempted against it. It is a pleasure to the spectator, but not of a very æsthetic character. Nothing of this kind is superior to his play of the *False Confidence*. The principal personage, Araminte, is very noble; the action is interesting; and

as to the description of the heart, it is Racine in miniature

Metromanie and Méchant.

Two masterpieces in the regular comedy in verse belong to writers who here, perhaps, have taken more pains, but in other departments have given a freer scope to their natural talent—the *Metromanie* of Piron and the *Méchant* of Gresset. The *Metromanie* is not written without humorous inspiration. In the young man possessed with a passion for poetry, Piron intended in some measure to paint himself; but as we are seldom too severe in ridicule of ourselves, he endows his hero further with talents, magnanimity and a good heart. But such tender reserve is not favorable for comic strength. The *Méchant* is one of those gloomy comedies which might be rapturously hailed by a Timon as serving to confirm his aversion to human society, but which, on social and cheerful minds, can only give rise to the most painful impression. Why paint a dark and odious disposition which, devoid of all human sympathy, feeds its vanity in a cold contempt and derision of everything, and solely occupies itself in aimless detraction?

Yet the French critics have decided that these three comedies, the *Glorieux*, the *Metromanie* and the *Méchant*, are all that the eighteenth century can oppose to Molière.

Opera.

Let us now turn for a moment to the opera, which, with its offspring, the vaudeville, has always been a

favorite form of entertainment. Neither had its origin in France, though it was among the French that both attained their greatest popularity, later becoming naturalized throughout Europe and the United States.

To the serious, heroic, or rather the ideal, opera, if we may so term it, only one poet gave his attention in the age of Louis XIV—Quinault, who is now little read, notwithstanding his unquestionable merit. As a tragic poet, in the early period of his career, he was satirized by Boileau; but he was afterward highly successful in the musical drama. Mazarin had introduced into France a taste for the Italian opera; Louis was also desirous of rivalling or surpassing foreign countries in the external magnificence of the drama, in decoration, machinery, music and dancing; these were all to be employed in the celebration of the court festivals; and accordingly Molière was employed to write gay, and Quinault serious, operas, to the music of Lulli. Quinault labored more after Spanish than Italian models, and derived from the Fiestas of Calderon the general form of his operas and the frequently allegorical preludes which are to be found in them. It is true, poetical ornament is much more sparingly dealt out, as the whole is necessarily shortened for the sake of the music; and the very nature of the French language and versification is incompatible with the splendid magnificence, the luxurious fullness, displayed by Calderon. But the operas of Quinault are, in their easy progress, truly fanciful; for the serious opera cannot be stripped of the charm of the marvellous without becoming wearisome. So far Quinault appears to have taken much better methods

in this department than Metastasio adopted. The latter has admirably provided for the wants of a melodious music expressive solely of feeling, but nowhere does he furnish the least food for the imagination. On the other hand, Quinault has sacrificed, in compliance with the taste of his countrymen, everything like comic intermixture, and he has been censured for an occasional play on language in the expression of feeling. Yet it is hardly just to exact the severity of the tragical cothurnus in light works of this description; for poetry also should be allowed her arabesque.

The verses of Quinault have no other naiveté and simplicity than those of the madrigal; and though they occasionally fall into the luscious, at other times they express a languishing tenderness with a soft and graceful melody. The opera, in Quinault's opinion, ought to resemble the enchanted gardens of Armida, of which he says: "In these enchanted spots pleasure presides." We should only be awakened out of the voluptuous dreams of feeling to enjoy the magical illusions of fancy. When once we have come to imagine, instead of real men, beings whose only language is song, it is but a very short step to represent to ourselves creatures whose only occupation is love; that feeling which hovers between the sensible and intellectual world; and the first invention becomes natural again by means of the second.

Quinault had no successor; for far below his, both in point of invention and execution, are the French operas of later times. The heroic and tragic have been required in a department where they cannot produce

their proper effect. Instead of handling with fanciful freedom mythological materials or subjects taken from chivalrous or pastoral romances, they have, after the manner of tragedy, chained themselves down to history, and by means of their heavy seriousness and the pedantry of their rules they have so managed matters that Dullness, with leaden sceptre, presides over the opera. The deficiencies of their music, the unfitness of the French language for such composition, the unaccented and arbitrary nature of their recitative, the bawling bravura of the singers, have been sufficiently described in the animadversions of musical critics.

Comic Opera.

With pretensions far lower, the comic opera, or operette, approaches much more nearly to perfection. With respect to composition, it assumes almost entirely a national tone. The transition from song to speech, without any musical accompaniment or heightening, which was censured by Rousseau as an unsuitable mixture of two distinct modes of composition, may be displeasing to the ear; but it has unquestionably produced an advantageous effect on the structure of the piece. In the recitatives, which generally are not half understood, and seldom listened to with any degree of attention, a plot which is even moderately complicated cannot be developed with due clearness. Hence, in the Italian opera buffa, the action is altogether neglected; and along with its grotesque caricatures, it is distinguished for uniform situations, which do not admit of

dramatic progress. But the comic opera of the French, although from the space occupied by the music it is not susceptible of much dramatic development, is still calculated to produce a considerable stage effect, and speaks pleasingly to the imagination. The poets have not here been prevented by the constraint of rules from following out their theatrical views. Hence these fleeting productions are in nowise deficient in the rapidity, life and attractiveness which are frequently wanting in the more pretentious dramatic works of the French.

The favor which the operettes of Favart and other poets have met with in foreign countries cannot be placed to the account of the music; it is in reality owing to their poetical merit.

Vaudeville.

The vaudeville, as first introduced in France, was but a variation of the comic opera. The essential difference was that it dispensed with composition, by which the comic opera formed a musical whole, as the songs were set to well-known popular airs. The incessant skipping from the song to the dialogue, with the accumulation of airs mostly common, but frequently also in a style altogether different from the poetry, was apt to drive an ear accustomed to Italian music to despair. If the spectator could once make up his mind to bear with this, he would not infrequently be richly recompensed with comic drollery; even in the choice of a melody, and the allusion to common and well-known subjects, there was often a display of wit. In earlier times writers of higher pretensions, as Le Sage and Piron, labored in

the department of the vaudeville, and even for marionettes. The wits who afterward dedicated themselves to this species were little known out of Paris, but this gave them no great concern. It often happened that several of them joined together, that the fruit of their common talents might be sooner brought to light. The parody of new theatrical pieces, the anecdotes of the day, which formed the common talk among all the idlers of the capital, must furnish them with subjects, and in working them up, little delay could be brooked.

Attempts at Variation in Drama.

The latter condition of dramatic art in France, toward the close of the eighteenth century, depended much on the endeavors to introduce the theatrical ideas of other countries in mixed species of the drama. The hope of producing anything really new in the two species which are alone admitted to be regular, of excelling the works already produced, of filling up the old frames with richer pictures, became more and more distant every day. A new work seldom obtained decided approbation; and, even at best, this approbation only lasted until it had been found out that the play was merely a new preparation of the old classical productions.

Diderot.

The attacks made on French forms of art, first by La Motte, and afterward by Diderot and Le Mercier, have been like voices in the wilderness. It could not be

otherwise, as the principles on which these writers proceeded were in reality destructive, not merely of the conventional forms, but of all poetical forms whatever. The most remarkable among them is Diderot, whom Lessing calls the best critic of the French, but whom other judges declare to be no critic at all. It is not merely that he has mistaken the object of poetry and the fine arts, which he considered to be merely moral. A man may be a critic without being a theorist; but a man cannot be a critic without being thoroughly acquainted with the conditions, means and styles of an art; and here the nature of Diderot's studies and acquirements renders his critical capabilities extremely questionable. This ingenious sophist deals out his blows with such haste in the province of criticism that the half of them are thrown away. The true and the false, the old and the new, the essential and the unimportant, are so mixed up together that the highest praise we can bestow upon him is that he is worthy of the labor of disentangling them.

What Diderot wished to accomplish had either been already accomplished, though not in France, or did not deserve to be accomplished, or was altogether impracticable. His attack on the formality of the dramatic probabilities, on the excessive symmetry of the French versification, declamation and mode of acting was just; but, at the same time, he objected to all theatrical elevation, and refused to allow to the characters anything like a perfect mode of communicating what was passing within them. He nowhere assigns the reason why he held versification as not suitable, or prose as more suit-

able, to familiar tragedy. This has been asserted by Lessing and others, of every species of the drama; but the ground for it is evidently nothing but the mistaken principles of illusion and nature. The main thing, according to Diderot, is not character and situations, but ranks of life and family relations, that spectators in similar ranks and relations may lay the example to heart. But this would put an end to everything like true enjoyment in art.

It is clear that Diderot was induced to take in sail as he made way with his own dramatic attempts. He displayed the greatest boldness in an offensive publication of his youth, in which he wished to overturn the entire dramatic system of the French; he was less daring in the dialogues which accompany his *Fils Naturel*, and he showed the greatest moderation in the treatise appended to his *Père de Famille*. He carried his hostility entirely too far with respect to the forms and objects of dramatic art. But in other respects he has not gone far enough; in his view of the unities of place and time, and the mixture of seriousness and mirth, he has shown himself infected with the prejudices of his nation.

The two pieces above mentioned, which obtained an unmerited reputation on their first appearance, have long since been awarded their due place in the drama. On the *Fils Naturel*, Lessing has pronounced a severe sentence, without, however, censuring the flagrant plagiarism from Goldoni. But the *Père de Famille* he calls an excellent work, while neglecting to assign any grounds for his opinion. Its defective plot and want of connection have been well exposed by La Harpe.

The execution of both pieces exhibits the utmost mannerism; the characters, which are anything but natural, appear from their frigid prating about virtue in the most hypocritical style, and the tears which they are perpetually shedding, altogether intolerable. The custom which has grown up of giving long and circumstantial directions respecting the action has been of the greatest detriment to dramatic eloquence. In this way the poet gives, as it were, an order on the player, instead of paying out of his own purse. All good dramatists have uniformly had the action in some degree present to their minds; but if the actor requires instruction on the subject he will hardly possess the talent of following it up with the suitable gestures. The speeches should be so framed that an intelligent actor could hardly fail to give them the proper action.

Long before Diderot there were serious family pictures, affecting dramas and familiar tragedies, much better than any which he was capable of executing. Voltaire gave in his *Enfant Prodigue* and *Nanine* a mixture of comic scenes and affecting situations, which are deserving of high praise. The sentimental drama had been before attempted in France by La Chaussée. All this was in verse, and why not? But the sentimental drama was never very successful in France, where people were too much attached to brilliancy and pomp.

Beaumarchais and Le Mercier.

Notwithstanding the opposition which Diderot experienced, he was the founder of a school of which the

most distinguished names are Beaumarchais and Le Mercier. The former wrote only two pieces in the spirit of his predecessor—*Eugénie* and *La Mère Coupable*—and they display the very same faults. His acquaintance with Spain and the Spanish theatre led him to bring something new on the stage in the way of the comedy of intrigue, a species which had long been neglected. His works were more distinguished by witty sallies than by humor of character; but their greatest attraction consisted in the allusions to his own career as an author. The plot of his *Barber of Seville* is rather trite; the *Marriage of Figaro* is planned with more art, but the manners which it portrays are loose; and it is also censurable in a poetical point of view, on account of the number of foreign excrescences with which it is loaded. In both French characters are exhibited under the disguise of a Spanish costume, which, however, is very ill observed. The extraordinary applause which these pieces met with would lead to the conclusion that the French public did not hold the comedy of intrigue in such low estimation as it is held by the critics; but the means by which Beaumarchais pleased were certainly, in part at least, foreign to art.

In the sphere of dramatic literature the labors of Le Mercier are undoubtedly deserving of attention. This able man endeavored to break through the prescribed limits in every possible way, and was so passionately fond of his art that nothing could deter him from it; although almost every new attempt which he made converted the pit into a regular field of battle. The inclinations of the French public, when they forget the

duties learned from Boileau's *Art of Poetry*, are not so hostile to the dramatic productions of other nations as might be supposed, and the old and narrow system is chiefly upheld by a superstitious attachment to traditional opinions.

Ducis' Adaptations of Shakespeare.

The attempt of Ducis to make his countrymen acquainted with Shakespeare by modeling a few of his tragedies according to the French rules, cannot be accounted an enlargement of their theatre. We perceive here and there indeed the "torn members of the poet;" but the whole is so constrained, disfigured, and from the simple fullness of the original, tortured and twisted into such miserable intricacy, that even when the language is retained word for word, it ceases to convey its genuine meaning. The crowd which these tragedies attracted, especially from their affording scope to the inimitable *Talma* for the display of his art, must be looked upon as no slight symptom of the people's dissatisfaction with their old dramas, and the want of others more powerfully agitating.

French Theatre in Eighteenth Century.

The histrionic art was more fully developed in France in the eighteenth century than in any other country in the world. In external dignity, quickness, correctness of memory and a wonderful degree of propriety and elegance in the delivery of verse, the best French actors

could hardly be surpassed. Their efforts to please were incredible, every moment they passed on the stage was a valuable opportunity, of which they must avail themselves. The extremely fastidious taste of the Parisian critics excited in them a spirit of warm emulation. A number of classical works for generations have been in the possession of the stage, and this fact contributed also greatly to their excellence. As the spectators knew these works well, their whole attention was directed to the acting, and even a faulty syllable would be detected.

High Comedy and Tragedy.

In high comedy the social refinement of the nation afforded great advantages to its actors. But in the representation of tragedy the art of the histrion does not accommodate itself to the spirit of the poetry. It is doubtful, indeed, whether the authors of tragedies, especially those of the age of Louis XIV, would have approved the mode in which their compositions were represented. The tragic imitation and recitation of the ordinary French tragedian oscillated between two opposite extremes, the first of which is occasioned by the prevailing tone of the piece, while the second seemed rather to be at variance with it, between measured formality and extravagant boisterousness. Here, be it understood, we are not speaking of the great masters, as Talma and Le Kain, or among women, Rachel and Mars.

Voltaire has described the manner in which, in the

time of Louis XIV, Augustus delivered his discourse to Cinna and Maximus. "Augustus entered with the step of a braggadocio, his head covered with a four-cornered peruque, which hung down to his girdle; the peruque was stuck full of laurel leaves, and above this he wore a large hat with a double row of red feathers. He seated himself on a huge fauteuil, two steps high, Cinna and Maximus on two low chairs; and the pompous declamation fully corresponded with the ostentatious manner in which he made his appearance. As at that time, and even long afterward, tragedies were acted in a court-dress of the newest fashion, with large cravats, swords and hats, no other movements were practicable but such as were allowable in the antechamber, or, at most, a slight waving of the hand; and it was even considered a bold theatrical attempt, when, in the last scene of *Polyeucte*, Severus entered with his hat on his head for the purpose of accusing Felix of treachery, and the latter listened to him with his hat under his arm."

There were also early examples of extravagance of an opposite description. In the *Mariamne* of Mairet, an older poet than Corneille, the player who acted Herod roared himself to death. When Voltaire was instructing an actress in some tragic part, she said to him: "Were I to play in this manner, Sir, they would say the devil was in me." "Very right," answered Voltaire, "an actress ought to have the devil in her." This expression proves, at least, no very keen sense for that dignity and sweetness which, in an ideal composition, such as French tragedy pretends to be, ought never to be lost sight of, even in the wildest whirlwind of

passion. But Voltaire, with all his genius, cannot be accepted as an authority on matters histrionic.

Schlegel on French Actors.

Says Schlegel, writing early in the nineteenth century: "Even in the action of the very best players of the present day there are sudden leaps from the measured solemnity in recitation and gesticulation which the general tone of the composition required, to a boisterousness of passion absolutely convulsive, without any due preparation or softening by intervening gradations. They are led to this by a sort of obscure feeling that the conventional forms of poetry generally impede the movements of nature; when the poet anywhere leaves them at liberty, they then indemnify themselves for the former constraint, and load, as it were, this rare moment of abandonment with the whole amount of life and animation which had been kept back, and which ought to have been equally diffused over the whole. Hence their convulsive and obstreperous violence. In bravura they take care not to be deficient; but they frequently lose sight of the true spirit of the composition. In general, with the single exception of the great Talma, they consider their parts as a sort of mosaic work of brilliant passages, and they rather endeavor to make the most of each separate passage, independently of the rest, than to go back to the visible central point of the character, and to consider every expression of it as an emanation from that point. They are always afraid of underdoing their parts; and hence they are

worse qualified for reserved action, for eloquent silence, where, under an appearance of outward tranquillity, the most hidden emotions of the mind are betrayed. However, this is a part which is seldom imposed on them by their poets; and if the cause of such excessive violence in the expression of passion is not to be found in the works themselves, they at all events occasion the actor to lay greater stress on superficial brilliancy than on a profound knowledge of character."

Marie Anne Dangeville.

A curious feature in the annals of the Comédie Française is the constant recurrence of the same family patronymic. We find, for instance, among its members, six bearing the name of Baron, seven of Poisson, and seven others of Quinault. The Dangevilles were five in number, and Marie Anne, the youngest of this well-known theatrical family, was beyond compare the best soubrette that had thus far appeared on the Parisian stage. Born in Paris, in 1714, at the age of eight she made her appearance at the Comédie Française as La Jeunesse in *L'Inconnu;* the part intrusted to her consisted of some fifty lines, which she spoke with such infantine grace and appropriate expression as to make her the feature of the performance. Enchanted with the intelligence and precocity of the young recruit, the public at once adopted her as an established favorite, and as long as her youth limited her to children's parts, "la petite Dangeville" was the object of universal admiration. As she grew older she profited by the example

and instruction of her aunt, Mdlle. Desmares; and on attaining her sixteenth year more than justified the general expectation of the brilliant success of her début, which took place in January, 1730, as the soubrette in Destouches' *Médisant.* Subsequently she was engaged to "double" Mdlle. Quinault in the soubrettes, as well as for the usual routine of juvenile tragedy.

Soon after her first appearance it was remarked by one of the foremost critics of the day: "She begins as the majority of great comedians finish—with perfection." His verdict was endorsed by the élite of Parisian society; the new actress speedily became the fashion, partly owing to her rare personal attractions, and partly to the sprightliness of her manner and the fascinating piquancy of her delivery. The versatility of her talent enabled her not merely to embody with life-like truth such widely different types as the Nicole of Molière and the Lisette of Marivaux, but even to represent with equal finish of detail the languishing coquette and the patched and powdered marquise. In addition to the standard repertory of the theatre, the parts originally created by her in the productions of the authors of her day included almost every successful comedy performed during a period exceeding thirty years, until her retirement from the stage in 1763.

As Hermione in Racine's *Andromaque* Dangeville charmed the spectators by an unexpected display of pathos and sensibility; the part of Tullie in *Brutus* was written for her by Voltaire, but, unwilling to risk her reputation by any further essays in a line of characters to which she felt herself naturally unsuited, she refused

it, and it was played by Madame Dufresne. She probably acted wisely in abandoning tragedy to others, and in contenting herself with the more congenial specialty in which she was acknowledged to be without a rival.

Dangeville possessed in an eminent degree the faculty of estimating, previous to the production of a piece, the chances of its success or failure; and by her intuitive knowledge of stage effects suggested many useful hints to leading dramatists of her day. On one occasion Destouches, while conversing on the subject of a new comedy, consulted her as to the propriety of suppressing a particular monologue, which he feared might not be to the taste of the audience. "Do nothing of the kind," she replied; "leave it exactly as it is, word for word, and I guarantee that you will not repent it." The event proved that she was right; the monologue in question, spoken by herself, being applauded to the echo, and winning a veritable triumph both for actress and author.

Saint-Foix' Estimate of Dangeville.

Saint-Foix, in a letter written after the retirement of Dangeville, gave a faithful record of the impression produced on him by a long acquaintance with the captivating soubrette. "You ask my opinion respecting a picture, the subject of which is intended to represent Thalia weeping, as she endeavors to retain an actress who persists in abandoning her. Your talent will undoubtedly do full justice to the comic muse; but as regards Mdlle. Dangeville—she being the model selected by you—how is it possible adequately to render her deli-

cately-shaped features, her eyes, her mouth, her sylph-like figure, her ever-charming and ever-varying expression? . . . We have seen Mdlle. Dangeville in characters essentially opposed to each other, and cannot even now decide in which she pleased us best. Those who come after us will scarcely believe that the same person could have played, and with indescribable perfection, Martine in *Les Femmes Savantes*, La Fause Agnès, La Comtesse de Pimbêche in *Les Plaideurs*, and Julie in *La Femme Juge et Partie*. . . . In Mdlle. Dangeville you would have found neither pride nor affectation of superiority; she was, and is, simple, modest and unconscious of her own value, and though exposed to perpetual contact with cabal and intrigue, has invariably remained a stranger to both."

Throughout her professional career, the popularity of this eminent actress may be truly said to have never experienced the slightest fluctuation. More than once, by a happy inspiration, she succeeded in reversing an unfavorable verdict. On the first performance of *Les Mécontents*, for instance, the audience, who had listened with impatience to the three acts of this indifferent comedy, were so enraptured by the arch vivacity with which she sang the final couplets as loudly to demand their repetition. She complied with the request, and at the close was called upon to sing them a third time; upon which she came to the front, and, instead of recommencing, merely repeated the concluding line: "There he is, like man who is never satisfied."

This significant hint, accompanied by a smile and a low curtsey, acted like magic on the spectators, who

applauded her till the house rang. As the fair siren afterward remarked, though *Les Mécontents* (The Dissatisfied) remained in the bills, there was not one left in the auditorium.

Retirement.

The announcement in 1763 of her retirement from the stage—conjointly with that of her brother and Mdlle. Gaussin—was a severe blow to the Comédie Française, and many years elapsed before the void occasioned by her departure was even partially filled up. On the evening preceding the annual closing of the theatre, her comrade, Dauberval, thus concluded the customary address to the public: "You have lost an actress who has long delighted and charmed you, and we a companion as dear to us as she was precious. Far from displaying, as is too frequently the case, any consciousness of superiority, she was modesty itself, and disclaimed all pretension of serving as a model for others. By the gentleness and amiability of her disposition she gained universal esteem and sympathy, and those who knew her best had the most reason to admire and to love her!"

On quitting the scene of her triumphs, after a glorious career of thirty-three years, Mdlle. Dangeville continued to reside at Vaugirard. She passed the remainder of her life happily, respected and unmolested even during the most disastrous period of the Revolution. She lived to be eighty-two, and her bust in marble still occupies a place of honor in the gallery of dramatic celebrities. In truth she was worthy of the honor; for

on the French stage there were none more highly respected, both in her public and private career.

Marie Françoise Dumesnil.

Seven years after the death of Adrienne Lecouvreur a young actress, of whose promising impersonations at Strasburg and Compiègne favorable accounts had reached the capital, made her first appearance at the Français in August, 1737, as Clytemnestre in *Iphigénie en Aulide*. Marie Françoise Dumesnil—for this was her name—was born in Normandy in 1712. She must, therefore, have been twenty-five years of age at her début, although she owned only to twenty-two.

Seldom, indeed, had a newcomer met with so enthusiastic a reception; for she was at once adopted by the public without a dissenting voice. So decisive was her triumph that the usual regulations of the theatre were set aside in her favor, and after a performance of *Phèdre* before the court at Fontainebleau, her admission as a member of the society was definitely accorded. She was spared the long and tedious apprenticeship which the greatest of her contemporaries had been compelled to undergo. A position, hitherto attainable only as a recompense for past services, was granted to her at the outset, and her right to it was amply justified by a popularity which lasted thirty-nine years. Since Lecouvreur no one had produced so powerful an effect on the audience by the terrible energy of her acting, and it is even doubtful whether, in certain characters, she did not surpass her famous predecessor, especially as Cléo-

pâtre. It is related that, on one occasion, so intense was the horror inspired by her impassioned fury that the occupants of the pit nearest the stage recoiled from her, leaving an empty space between the orchestra and themselves. On the same evening, in the scene where, expiring in a convulsion of rage, she uttered the line, "I would curse the gods if they restored me to life," an old officer, seated on one side of the stage, struck her a sharp blow on the back, exclaiming in a transport of indignation: "Begone, you bitch!" At the conclusion of the tragedy the officer apologized for the outrage he had committed, and was laughingly assured by the actress that of all the compliments she had received during her life, his was the most gratifying.

Unlike her rival, Mdlle. Clairon, whose excellence was the result of a rare artistic intelligence combined with unremitting study, Mdlle. Dumesnil depended for her inspiration on nature alone. Endowed with every innate quality essential to the formation of a great actress, she needed no feigned sensibility, no simulated passion; guided by her unerring instinct, and completely identifying herself with the personage represented, she was pathetic or terrible as the situation demanded, but always in earnest, always irresistibly real. She saw at a glance the effect to be produced, and never missed it; a single reading of the part sufficed not only to imprint its leading features on her memory, but also to indicate with infallible accuracy the precise scene or moment where the talent of the exponent could be most advantageously displayed. On this particular point she concentrated every effort of her genius, and herein lay her

principal defect. Preserving herself wholly for the outburst of rage or tenderness destined to electrify her hearers, she was too apt to neglect the relatively unimportant passages leading up to it, and to hurry over them with a volubility sometimes bordering on the ludicrous. These sudden and abrupt transitions from a rapid and monotonous delivery—totally free, however, from the declamatory sing-song of many of her colleagues—to a height of sublimity unequalled, perhaps, in the annals of French tragedy, were strongly censured by the admirers of Clairon, as contrasting unfavorably with her rival's minute attention to detail; but their criticisms had little weight with the general public; for Dumesnil, during the entire course of their professional rivalry, was unquestionably the more popular of the two.

Dorat on Dumesnil.

Dorat, in his poem of *La Declamation*, declares that Melpomene herself has appeared, describing in graphic terms his own impressions, while horror-struck by her appalling impetuosity, and quailing beneath her penetrating eye. "Such was her Cléopâtre, such her Clytemnestre, in all the majesty of their regal robes, and surrounded by the pomp and glittering paraphernalia of the stage;" but what a difference was there between the imposing actress, whose eagle glance and thrilling tones held despotic sway over the spell-bound multitude, and the unambitious bourgeoise who, her gems and costly trappings laid aside, returned on foot and unattended to her modest home!

Unlike the superb and haughty Clairon, whose queenly magnificence never deserted her for an instant, Mdlle. Dumesnil, once removed from the scene of her triumphs, quietly resumed her simple habits with her every-day attire, and aspired to no further sovereignty. Naturally reserved and averse to publicity, she had little temptation to mix in general society. Though her features were intelligent and agreeable, she had no pretension to beauty, and was, therefore, unlikely to attract the notice of the fashionable gallants of the day. A curious anecdote is related by a contemporary chronicler. The actress was dining in company with D'Alembert, a member of the Academy, and Mdlle. Gaussin, when the former, whose talent for mimicry was well known, was solicited by the host to give them a specimen of his ability. "Let us see," he said, "if the two ladies present can inspire you." The academician, by no means unwilling to accept the challenge, proceeded to copy the voice and manner of Mdlle. Gaussin so successfully that the party were convulsed with laughter; and then came the turn of Dumesnil. Before he had recited more than three or four lines with appropriate gestures, the actress started from her chair. "There it is," she exclaimed, "my left arm, my unlucky left arm! For the last ten years I have been striving to render it as supple as the other, and I cannot! It will hang as stiff as an icicle, and he," pointing to D'Alembert, and involuntarily assuming her most tragic tone, "he has found it out!" Yet this slight infirmity, which to any one but D'Alambert would have passed unnoticed, was the only thing stiff about her acting; for with mobility

of feature she combined remarkable flexibility of voice and grace of gesture.

Voltaire's Appreciation.

None appreciated her merit more cordially than Voltaire, although, in order not to excite the jealousy of Mdlle. Clairon, with whom it was indispensable for him to be on good terms, he avoided any open manifestation of his preference. His *Mérope* was written expressly for Dumesnil, and it is recorded that, during the first rehearsals, she only partially succeeded in satisfying him, her conception appearing to him deficient in energy. "But, sir," she objected, on his urging her to throw more spirit into the part, "one must be Mérope herself to please you!" "That is precisely what I wish you to be," coolly replied Voltaire. However, when the decisive night arrived, he had no reason to complain of any tameness on the part of the actress; for never had she been more touchingly pathetic, more incomparably sublime. The effect of her performance was heightened by a happy innovation, which no actor had as yet ventured to attempt. In the scene where Mérope reveals the secret of Egisthus' birth, and thus stays the tyrant's arm about to strike him, Dumesnil darted across the stage in a transport of maternal anguish, threw herself before her son and strove to shield him from the impending blow. This inspiration, rapturously applauded by the audience, was regarded by Voltaire as a masterpiece of art. "Mérope," he said, "is no longer mine, it belongs of right to Mdlle. Dumesnil."

Besides the characters already cited, we may mention among her most successful personations Zulime, Hécube in *Les Troyens*, and Semiramis. Her attempts in comedy were few; but two of them, says a contemporary writer, would have sufficed to insure the celebrity of any actress—*La Gouvernante* and Léonide in *Ésope à la Cour*. In the last years of her stage career she limited her performances to her three favorite parts, Mérope, Clytemnestre and Semiramis, retiring at the close of the theatrical season in 1776. She became entitled to the usual pension from the Comédie of fifteen hundred livres, which was doubled by Louis XVI, a very moderate recompense for an uninterrupted service of thirty-nine years.

Rivalry of Clairon.

The retirement of Dumesnil occasioned no alteration in her ordinary life. She had never cared for social notoriety, nor sought to prolong her prestige as tragedy queen beyond the fall of the curtain. Her attire had always been of the simplest, even during the most brilliant period of her professional career; and of this indifference to admiration the following instance is recorded: In 1770, when Clairon, who had left the stage a few years before, was actively engaged in superintending the début of her favorite pupil Larive, she expressly stipulated that several ladies of the court and other personages of distinction should be allowed to attend the rehearsals, tickets of admission to which bore her own signature. The piece was *Le Comte*

d'Essex, and at the appointed hour the actors arrived, for the most part in full gala costume, in honor of the noble visitors, Clairon surpassing everyone in the splendor of her toilette. Dumesnil, however, with her usual aversion to ceremony, appeared in her everyday dress, and on being reproached for her negligence, replied that she could rehearse better in her jacket than with a long robe trailing behind her. Clairon, who had overheard the remark, smiled sarcastically, and the ladies in the boxes laughed outright; but their insolence by no means disconcerted the object of their merriment, who, on taking her position on the stage, instinctively assumed the air and attitude of Elizabeth, and so electrified her hearers by the intensity of her passion that not only the spectators, but the actors themselves were paralyzed.

In a letter to M. d'Argental, Mdlle. Dumesnil says: "I am naturally simple and confiding, sincere in my friendship and incapable of intrigue, but not without a certain penetration. I was far from suspecting the manœuvres directed against me by my enemies, although their object was to injure my reputation and discourage whatever talent I may possess. I imagined that my manner of living and my punctuality in the performance of my duties would protect me from insult, but I was mistaken. I have suffered long and deeply, but cannot bring myself to employ the same weapons against others which they have not scrupled to use against me." She requests him, in his capacity of "first gentleman of the chamber," to excuse her from playing an insignificant part in one of Voltaire's tragedies.

"You deprive me of the characters best suited to me, and insist on my accepting one which no one else will consent to undertake. Is not this presuming too much on my attachment to you and to M. de Voltaire?"

The Revolution, and the consequent suppression of all government pensions, proved a severe blow to Mdlle. Dumesnil, and during the Reign of Terror she was reduced to a state of absolute indigence. Subsequently, on the establishment of the Consulate, her claims were not forgotten. A lodging in the Palais Royal and a small income were accorded her, and her declining years were passed in comparative ease. She died in 1803.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century a new species of drama arose in France. Its professed aim was to become an agent of social reform; its mission was to diffuse the new gospel of philanthropy. But, in fact, its results, however important in France and other parts of Europe, fell far short of its aim, as stated by its philosophic originator, Diderot. In the language of Madame de Staël it was not nature, but merely the "affectation of nature," which they exhibited. Diderot, however, claimed that he had invented a third dramatic form—the serious, which he considered the consummation of dramatic art. Classical tragedy had been weighted down by artificiality in every direction, and thus made monstrous and rationally inconceivable. The effect of the new plays was intended to spring from their truth to nature, which should bring home its moral teachings to the hearts of all. The theatre was to become a moral school. It was to inculcate the principles of society and of the conduct of life. Though the idea

was not entirely new, being found in the dreams of various social philosophers, no attempt had ever been made to carry it into practice.

Sentimental Plays.

For a time there was a conflict between the enfeebled artistic school and the new tendency which at first was not definitely understood, even by those who took part in it. Beaumarchais, in the beginning of his career, wrote sentimental plays, in imitation of Diderot, which he called vaguely dramas, and this name became the accepted title of the hybrid species to which they belonged. But his later works were of a different kind. The famous *Barbier de Séville* and the *Mariage de Figaro* were simply bold revivals of the old Spanish comedy of intrigue. He not only surpassed all his predecessors in the skillful framing of plots, but he drew his characters with a truth of nature peculiar to himself. Furthermore, the dialogue was brilliant with flashes of wit, and both action and dialogue conveyed political and social meanings. In consequence of its searchlight illumination of the old régime, his *Figaro* may be regarded as a herald of the French Revolution.

The Theatre Under the First Empire.

But the plays of Beaumarchais could not suit the rule of the despot who fully understood their political significance. Under the Empire comedy became chiefly a harmless treatment of manners. The theatre shared in

all the movements and changes which ensued in France, but the revolution which the drama itself was destined to undergo was not one of native origin. Vaudeville was merely an interspersion of pantomime with the airs of popular songs; the operetta was a miniature opera, originally of the pastoral species, and melodrama became merely a drama accentuated by music.

But at the chief home of the drama none of these supplementary branches were admitted. At the Comédie Française, whose history as that of a single company of actors had begun in 1680, the party strife of the times made itself audible. The most prominent tragic poet of the Revolution, M. J. de Chénier, wrote for the national stage in his *Charles IX* or *École des Rois*, an historical drama with a political moral, in which, in 1789, Talma achieved his first complete success. The Revolution proclaimed among other liberties that of the theatres in Paris, of which soon no less than fifty were open; but in 1807 the empire restricted the number to nine and reinstated the Français in sole possession, or nearly so, of the right of performing the classic drama. No writer of note was tempted or inspired by the rewards and other encouragements offered by Napoleon to produce a classic tragedy.

The French are a nation of artists, and are as much at home in the dramatic as in other forms of art. The drama is perhaps the medium best suited for the expression of certain qualities peculiar to the French. Chief among their national characteristics are a lively wit, a love of effect for its own sake, a gift for composing beautiful sentiments and expressing brilliant ideas,

and a love of order, symmetry and clearness. These are precious qualities in the dramatist, and just as they contributed their share toward the beauty of the comedy and tragedy which amused and moved the people of Paris and the court of the king Louis XIV, so they have helped to make the drama of France what it now is.

Decadence of the Drama.

Slowly and surely the desire to do nothing outside of the rules, or in any way indecorous, was choking all life out of the theatre. As Saintsbury aptly puts it, "Each piece was expected to resemble something else, and originality was regarded as a mark of bad taste and insufficient culture." The French drama of the opening years of the nineteenth century is the empty echo of a hollow past. Its aim was to equal Voltaire; Voltaire had admiringly copied Racine; Racine had sought to reproduce in French the tragedy of the Greeks as he saw it, chiefly through the medium of the Latin adaptations; and thus there was imitation of imitations, almost without end. "French tragedy," said Goethe, "is a parody of itself." If the great critic thought this of the tragedy of Voltaire, what must he have thought of the tragedy of Voltaire's feeble followers?

The Dramatic Unities.

The hall-mark of a tragedy, according to the rules, was the blind obedience paid to the unities. The French critics pretended to derive from Aristotle a law that a

dramatic poem should show one action happening in one place in the space of one day; these were the unities of action, place and time. As to the unity of action, there need be no dispute; any work of art must have a single distinct motive and mainspring. But both the unity of time, which compelled the hurried massing of all the straggling incidents of a tale into the course of twenty-four hours or less, and the unity of place, which forbade all change of scene—these were absurdities. In 1629 a Frenchman, Mairet, had brought out at Rouen an imitation of Trissino's *Sofonisba*, in which the three unities appeared for the first time. Corneille early gave in his adhesion to the principle, but found it hard to reconcile his practice. Although the Italians and French supposed that they were imitating the ancients, it is a fact that the unities of time and place were not considered among the Greek tragedians as a principle, nor does Aristotle lay them down as laws. He says nothing at all as to the unity of place; and in speaking of the unity of time he probably meant merely to declare the habitual practice among the best dramatists. It is safe to say that Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides never gave a thought to either unity of time or unity of place. By accident, and because of the physical conditions of the Greek theatre, they had to condense their story as much as they could, and to be sparing of change of scene. That they did not hesitate to shift the place of action when it suited their purpose there can be no doubt, and of this there are many instances, as in the *Hecuba* of Euripides and the *Eumenides* of Æschylus. Moreover, the laws which Aristotle lays down in the

third century B. C. were not intended to apply to the French drama more than twenty centuries later.

The French and the Classic Drama.

The simplicity, the directness and, above all, the unconsciousness to which the Greek drama owed so much of its poetry and its power, were qualities wholly foreign to the French court of Louis XIV, and they were neither appreciated there, nor in the main even understood. The severity and stately dignity of the Greek drama, in great part the result of the circumstances under which it was acted, were foreign to the turbulent and fiery tragedy of Corneille, produced under wholly different conditions and in a wholly altered state of society, with far more complex emotions. The Greek actor, raised aloft on his buskins, and speaking through a resonant mask, that he might be seen and heard by the vast multitude seated before him in the open amphitheatre, was prevented from all violent action, and compelled to assume a certain stateliness. But the French actor, in the rich and elaborate costume of his own time, declaimed his verses in a small hall, before a select audience, many of whom had seats upon the stage, crowding the performers into a narrow lane between rows of spectators and into a narrow space between these spectators and the foot-lights. To attempt to reproduce, under these conditions, the massive dignity of the Greek stage, was to attempt the impossible. At best the result would be literary merely, and not lifelike. It is not to be denied that the regularity and concentration imposed

on the dramatist by the observance of the three unities may at times have helped the writer of genius, who is but the stronger for the difficulties he struggles with; the feeble, however, were made more feeble still; and even a writer of genius like Corneille chafed against rigid restrictions which he was not flexible enough to overcome. It is pitiful to see how the virile and vigorous Corneille, in his three discourses on dramatic composition, humbles himself before the shadow of Aristotle and the ancients, and begs to be allowed to stretch the "single day" to, say, thirty hours, and to take as the "single place" a whole town, in different parts of which the action may go on. How the bonds hampered the poet is summed up concisely in the judgment which the Academy, at Richelieu's order, passed on Corneille's *Cid*—that the poet, in endeavoring to observe the rules of art, had chosen rather to sin against those of nature and common-sense.

The Drama of Racine and Voltaire.

Racine's calmer genius worked without revolt under the rules which pinioned Corneille; he found his account in them. To him his characters were of first importance, and what they felt and thought and said; whereas Corneille was concerned chiefly with the action, and with what his people did—what they might have to say was of less interest. When action was proscribed, and little was done, and everything was talked about, Corneille chafed against the tightening bonds; but Racine seemed to dance best in fetters. And as Racine

came after Corneille, and became the foremost tragic writer of the magnificent court of Louis XIV, the courtly graces with which he had endowed tragedy were afterward inseparable from it. So the frank and free-spoken drama of Corneille gave way before the fine-lady muse of Racine—not any weaker, it may be, but more polished and mannered. The twist once given, French tragic drama turned more and more away from nature, and became more and more artificial and barren. Later came Voltaire, who was never tired of finding fault with Corneille and had nothing but praise for Racine. He gave in to the pseudo-unities of time and place, although with characteristic ingenuity he evaded them, while pretending to be bound by them. Voltaire even refined on his predecessor. He had a horror of the colloquial; he screwed dramatic diction two or three turns higher, and still further from nature. For his fastidious taste even Greek tragedy was too simple and too familiar. He never by any chance allowed to pass one of those homely words which reach the heart so readily; these were banished, and a dignified periphrasis took their place.

Voltaire, after all, was a man of genius, however false his doctrines, and the full feebleness of which French tragedy was capable, when it was made according to his precepts, was evident only after his death and in the works of his followers—men of very moderate talent, just able to copy correctly the faults of their elders and betters. In their hands the tragic drama lost what little life it had left, and the red heels of Racine lengthened into unmistakable stilts. There were not wanting those who now and then inveighed against long monologues,

the two false unities, and the device of confidants; but the admirers of "dignity and correctness" made a firm front against these barbarians. As time went on, tragedy went from bad to worse. Even in the days of the Revolution, even in the carnage of 1793, the Théâtre Français continues to bring forth vapid and innocuous classical tragedies. With the return of order and the subsequent worship of republican Greece and Rome, the so-called classic drama got the benefit of the craze for antiquity.

CRISPIN, RIVAL OF HIS MASTER

(CRISPIN, RIVAL DE SON MAITRE)

BY

LE SAGE

(*Translated by W. H. H. Chambers.*)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

M. ORONTE, citizen of Paris.

MADAM ORONTE, his Wife.

ANGÉLIQUE, their Daughter, promised to Damis.

VALÈRE, lover of Angélique.

M. ORGON, Father of Damis.

LISETTE, Angélique's maid.

CRISPIN, Valère's valet.

LABRANCHE, Damis' valet.

Crispin, Rival of His Master.

ARGUMENT.

Valère loves Angélique, daughter of M. and Madam Oronte, and is loved in return. He learns from Lisette, the maid, that Angélique is promised in marriage to Damis, son of M. Orgon, and that the wedding is to take place upon the arrival of father and son, who are expected at any moment. Crispin, valet of Valère, meets an old friend, Labranche, and learns from him that he has become Damis' valet and has come to Paris to withdraw the word of M. Orgon, as Damis was shortly before forced to marry a girl at Chartres, where he resides. Crispin concocts a scheme to pass himself off as Damis, to marry Angélique and to abscond with the dowry, of which he promises one-half to Labranche. M. Orgon, however, deciding, after the departure of Labranche from Chartres, to go himself to Paris, comes unexpectedly upon the scene, and notwithstanding the various clever manœuvres of the two valets, finally meets Oronte, whereupon all is discovered. Valère marries Angélique, and amid the attendant happiness the rascally valets are pardoned.

Scene:—Paris in the street before the house of M. Oronte.

Valère.—Ah! you here, you scamp?

Crispin.—Let's talk without getting our dander up.

Val.—Scoundrel!

Cris.—Don't mention, I beg you, our accomplishments.—What do you complain of?

Val.—What do I complain of, villain? You asked for a week's holiday and I haven't seen you for more than a month. Is this the way a valet should serve his master?

Cris.—Zounds! I serve you, sir, as you pay me; it would seem that one has no more reason to complain than the other.

Val.—I'd like to know where you come from anyway?

Cris.—I've just returned from trying to make my fortune. I've been on a little expedition in Touraine with a chevalier—one of my friends.

Val.—What sort of an expedition?

Cris.—To collect a tax he levies on provincials, by the manner of his play.

Val.—Then you arrive quite apropos as I'm entirely without ready cash and you must have money to loan.

Cris.—No, sir. Our catch was not lucky; the fish saw the hook and wouldn't swallow the bait.

Val.—What a pretty banker, this fellow! Listen, Crispin, I'm willing to pardon the past, I need your cleverness.

Cris.—What magnanimity!

Val.—I'm in a terrible fix.

Cris.—Are your creditors growing impatient? That big merchant, for whom you signed a nine hundred franc note, in return for the thirty pistoles of stuff he furnished you, has he obtained judgment?

Val.—No.

Cris.—Ah! I have it now. That generous marquise who went herself to pay your tailor, who had sued you, has discovered that it was a put-up job?

Val.—No such trifle, Crispin; I'm in love.

Cris.—Ho! Ho!—with whom, perchance?

Val.—With Angélique, the only daughter of Monsieur Oronte.

Cris.—I know her by sight. Deucedly pretty girl, too. Her father, I believe, is that very rich fellow who lives in yonder house.

Val.—Yes, he has three large houses in the finest quarters in Paris.

Cris.—How worthy of adoration, this Angélique!

Val.—He's said, besides, to have plenty of ready money.

Cris.—Now I fully realize your excessive love.—But how are you getting on with the girl? Does she know anything about your passion?

Val.—For a week or so I've had free access to her father's house and I've done so nicely that she already looks on me with favoring eyes. Lisette, the maid, however, told me a bit of news yesterday that weighs upon my heart.

Cris.—And what did she tell you, this heart-weighter Lisette?

Val.—That I have a rival, a young man from the provinces, to whom Monsieur Oronte has pledged his word; the young fellow is to arrive almost immediately at Paris to marry Angélique.

Cris.—Ah! and who is this rival?

Val.—That's just what I haven't learned yet; they called Lisette while she was telling me this despairing news, and I was obliged to leave without the name.

Cris.—It rather looks as if we were not to become proprietors at once of those three houses in the finest quarters of Paris.

Val.—Go see Lisette for me, and have a chat with her; we'll build our plan accordingly.

Cris.—Trust that to me.

Val.—I'll await you at our lodging. (He leaves.)

Cris.—(Alone.) How tired I am of being a valet.—Ah! Crispin you're alone at fault. You've always been a sport and chased baubles; you must be a financier—with the wit and

cleverness you have, by gad! you might already have failed several times.

Enter Labranche.

Labranche.—(Aside.) Isn't that Crispin?

Crispin.—(Aside.) By gad, that looks like Labranche.

Lab.—(Aside.) It's Crispin, Crispin himself.

Cris.—(Aside.) It's Labranche, I'd stake my life upon it. (Aloud.) What a lucky meeting! Let me embrace you, my dear fellow; to be entirely frank, not seeing you any longer in Paris, I feared that some judge's sentence had carried you off.

Lab.—Upon my faith, old friend, I've had a narrow shave since I saw you last. They wished to give me occupation at sea; I thought I would be one of that last detachment for the galleys.

Cris.—Holy smoke! What the deuce did you do?

Lab.—One night I took it into my head to stop, in an out-of-the-way place, a stranger to inquire, purely out of curiosity, the news of his land. He was unacquainted with French and thought I demanded his purse. He cried: Help! thief! The watch came, they took me for a knave and led me to prison. I was there seven weeks.

Cris.—Seven weeks!

Lab.—Yes, and I should have been there yet if it had not been for the niece of an old-clothes woman.

Cris.—Is that so?

Lab.—They were tremendously prejudiced against me, but this good friend of mine moved so vigorously in the interest of my case, that she made known my innocence.

Cris.—It's well to have lusty, vigorous friends.

Lab.—This adventure has caused me to reflect.

Cris.—I believe you. You are no longer curious to learn the news of foreign lands?

Lab.—Heavens and earth! no. I've reëntered service and you, Crispin, still working on your own account?

Cris.—No, I am like yourself, a retired knave. I've re-entered service also, but I serve a master without means,

which implies a valet without wages. I am little content with my position.

Lab.—Well, I'm quite content with mine. I live at Chartres, where I serve a young man named Damis. He's a whole-souled fellow; he loves wine, woman and gambling—an all-around chap—we go on all sorts of debauches together; it amuses and keeps me out of evil ways.

Cris.—What an innocent life!

Lab.—Isn't that a fact?

Cris.—Assuredly. But tell me, Labranche, what brings you to Paris? Where are you going?

Lab.—(Pointing to the house of M. Oronte.) I'm going there.

Cris.—To Monsieur Oronte's house?

Lab.—His daughter is betrothed to Damis.

Cris.—Angélique promised to your master?

Lab.—Monsieur Orgon, the father of Damis, was at Paris a couple of weeks ago and I was with him. We went to see Monsieur Oronte, who is one of his oldest friends, and between them they arranged this marriage.

Cris.—This matter has been fully determined upon?

Lab.—Yes, the contract has been already signed by both fathers and Madam Oronte. The dowry of twenty thousand francs (literally; ecus) in cash is all ready; they await only the arrival of Damis to terminate the thing.

Cris.—Ah! by gad! if that's the case, Valère, my master, has nothing to do but seek fortune elsewhere.

Lab.—What, your master?——

Cris.—He loves this same Angélique; but as Damis——

Lab.—Oh! Damis won't marry Angélique, never fear; there's a little difficulty.

Cris.—What?

Lab.—While his father was marrying him here, he married himself at Chartres.

Cris.—How was that?

Lab.—He loved a young lady, with whom his relations had

been such that, at the return of the good man Orgon, there was a secret meeting of the parents on both sides; she is a girl of good birth and Damis has been obliged to marry her.

Cris.—Well, that puts a different face on the matter.

Lab.—I found the wedding clothes of my master already made and am ordered to take them to Chartres as soon as I have seen Monsieur and Madam Oronte and withdrawn the word of Monsieur Orgon.

Cris.—Withdrawn the word of Monsieur Orgon?

Lab.—This principally brings me to Paris.—I won't say good-bye, Crispin, we shall meet again.

Cris.—Wait a moment, Labranche, wait, my friend. An idea strikes me; tell me, is your master known to Monsieur Oronte?

Lab.—They have never seen each other.

Cris.—Holy smoke! if you are willing we can make a ten-strike—but after your late adventure, I fear you lack courage.

Lab.—No, no; you have but to tell me. One tempest doesn't prevent a good sailor from reëmbarking. Speak out, what's the idea? To make your master pass for Damis and to marry him to——

Cris.—My master? For shame! He's a pretty beggar for a girl like Angélique! I've chosen a better party.

Lab.—Who, then?

Cris.—Myself.

Lab.—The devil! You're right, though, and the scheme is not badly contrived, at least.

Cris.—I love her also.

Lab.—I authorize your love.

Cris.—I will take the name of Damis.

Lab.—Well said.

Cris.—I will marry Angélique.

Lab.—You have my consent.

Cris.—I'll receive the dowry.

Lab.—That's good.

Cris.—And I'll disappear before the matter is cleared up.

Lab.—I'd like a little more light on that last point.

Cris.—Why?

Lab.—You spoke of disappearing with the dowry, without mentioning me; that plan evidently needs a little correcting.

Cris.—Oh, we'll disappear together.

Lab.—With this as a condition, I'll serve as your croupier —'Tis a bold stroke I admit, but my audacity reawakens and I feel that I am born for great things. Where shall we go to conceal the dowry?

Cris.—In the depths of some far-away province.

Lab.—I believe it would be safer outside of the kingdom altogether, don't you?

Cris.—We'll see about that later on.—But tell me something of the character of Monsieur Oronte.

Lab.—He's a stupid sort of a fellow—fat-witted.

Cris.—And Madam Oronte?

Lab.—A woman of from twenty-five to sixty, who loves herself; a woman with a mind so uncertain and inconstant that she believes at the same moment both the pros and the cons.

Cris.—That's enough. Now I must borrow some clothes for——

Lab.—You can use my master's—yes, it so happens, you're about the same build.

Cris.—By gad, he's not badly made!

Lab.—I see some one coming out of Monsieur Oronte's house. Let us go to the inn where I lodge, to arrange the details of our enterprise.

Cris.—First I must run to my lodging to speak to Valère and induce him by a pretended disclosure to stay away from Monsieur Oronte's for several days. I shall join you shortly. (He leaves at one side and Labranche at the other.)

Enter Angélique and Lisette.

Angélique.—Yes, Lisette, since Valère declared his passion, I have been consumed by a secret chagrin, and I feel that if I marry Damis it will cost me my life's repose.

Lisette.—What a dangerous fellow, this Valère!

Ang.—How unfortunate I am! Put yourself in my place, Lisette, and counsel me I beg you. What ought I to do?

Lis.—What counsel can I offer?

Ang.—That inspired by the interest you take in all that concerns me.

Lis.—Two kinds of counsel only can I offer you, the one: to forget Valère; the other: to brace yourself against paternal authority. You're too much in love to follow the first, and my conscience is too tender to offer you the second. It's very embarrassing, as you see.

Ang.—Ah! Lisette, you drive me to despair.

Lis.—But wait.—It seems to me that perhaps we may be able to reconcile your love and my conscience.—Yes, go to your mother.

Ang.—And tell her?

Lis.—Everything; confess freely. She loves to be flattered and caressed; flatter and caress her. You may depend she loves you, and will perhaps oblige your father to withdraw his word.

Ang.—You're doubtless right, Lisette, but I fear——

Lis.—What?

Ang.—You know my mother; she's so changeable.

Lis.—It's true she always is of the same opinion as the last one that speaks, but never mind, we'll win her to our side anyway—oh! I see her—go for a moment and come back when I signal. (Angélique retires to the background.)

Enter Madam Oronte.

Lisette.—(Pretending not to see Madam Oronte.) It must be admitted that Madam Oronte is one of the most charming women in Paris.

Madam Oronte.—You are very complimentary, Lisette.

Lis.—Ah! Madam, I did not see you. Those words were the continuation of a conversation I have just had with Mademoiselle Angélique regarding her marriage. You have, I told her, the most judicious of mothers, the most reasonable.

Madam Oron.—In truth, Lisette, I little resemble other women; reason always decides my judgments.

Lis.—Undoubtedly.

Madam Oron.—I'm neither obstinate nor capricious.

Lis.—And withal the best mother in the world. Why, I wager that if your daughter felt the slightest repugnance to marry Damis you would not constrain her inclination.

Madam Oron.—I constrain her? I annoy my daughter? God forbid that I should do the least violence to her feelings! Tell me, Lisette, does she feel an aversion to Damis?

Lis.—Ah, but——

Madam Oron.—Conceal nothing from me.

Lis.—Since you wish to know everything, Madam, I must admit that she does feel repugnance for this marriage.

Madam Oron.—Perhaps she has fallen in love with another?

Lis.—Oh! Madam, that's the rule; when a girl feels an aversion to the man chosen for her husband, that always indicates an inclination for another. You have told me, for instance, that you hated Monsieur Oronte the first time he was proposed, because you loved an officer who died at the siege of Candia.

Madam Oron.—It is true; and if this poor fellow had not been dead I should never have married Monsieur Oronte.

Lis.—Well, Madam, your daughter is of exactly the same mind that you were before the siege of Candia.

Madam Oron.—And who is then the cavalier who has discovered how to please her?

Lis.—It is that young nobleman, who, for a week or more, has been coming to play at our house.

Madam Oron.—Who, Valère?

Lis.—Valère himself.

Madam Oron.—That reminds me that yesterday he looked at us, Angélique and me, with eyes so full of passion.—Are you sure Lisette, quite sure that it is my daughter he loves?

Lis.—(Beckoning Angélique.) Yes, Madam, he told me so himself, and charged me to ask permission for him to come to beg of you her hand.

Angélique.—(Coming forward.) Pardon me, Madam, if my feelings do not conform to yours; but you know——

Madam Oron.—I know quite well that a girl does not always regulate the movements of her heart according to her parents' wishes; but I am tender, I am good, I share your pains; in brief, I consent to Valère's addresses.

Ang.—I cannot find words, Madam, to express my gratitude.

Lis.—It is hardly enough, Madam. Monsieur Oronte is rather stubborn, and if you do not maintain vigorously——

Madam Oron.—Oh! rest easy on that point. I take Valère under my special protection; my daughter shall have no other husband but him and, remember, I say so (seeing M. Oronte coming). But my husband comes. You shall now see in what a strain I talk to him.

Enter M. Oronte.

Madam Oronte.—You come quite apropos, Monsieur; I desire to inform you that it is no longer my intention to marry my daughter to Damis.

M. Oronte.—Ah! and may I inquire, Madam, why you have changed your mind?

Madam Oron.—Because a better match offers. Valère asks for her hand. It is true he is not so rich as Damis, but he is a nobleman and we can pardon his narrow means in favor of his rank.

Lisette.—(Aside.) Good!

M. Oron.—I esteem Valère, and without paying any attention to his light purse I would willingly give him my daughter if I could do so with honor; but it cannot be, Madam.

Madam Oron.—And why, I should like to know?

M. Oron.—Why? Do you wish us to break our word to our old friend, Monsieur Orgon? Has he given you cause for complaint?

Madam Oron.—No.

Lis.—(Whispering to Madam Oronte.) Courage, don't give in!

M. Oron.—Why, then, insult him in this way? Remember,

the contract is signed, the preparations are finished and we await only Damis. We have gone too far to retract, have we not?

Madam Oron.—Really, I had not thought of all these matters.

Lis.—(Aside.) Good-bye! the weather-vane is shifting!

M. Oron.—You are too sensible, Madam, to oppose this marriage.

Madam Oron.—Oh! I don't oppose it at all.

Lis.—(Aside.) Heavens and earth! is that a woman? she don't contradict.

Madam Oron.—You see, Lisette, I have done all in my power for Valère.

Lis.—Yes, truly, he is indeed a specially well protected lover.

M. Oron.—(Seeing Labranche coming.) But I perceive Damis' valet.

Enter Labranche.

Labranche.—Your very humble servant, Monsieur and Madam Oronte.—Servant most humble, Mademoiselle Angélique.—Good day, Lisette.

M. Oronte.—Well, any news, Labranche?

Lab.—Monsieur Damis, your son-in-law and my master, has just arrived at the inn from Chartres; he follows me almost immediately; I have hurried on to announce him.

Angélique.—(Aside.) Oh, heavens!

M. Oron.—I've been anxiously awaiting him—but why didn't he come straight to my house? Considering our close relations, ought he not to drop all ceremony?

Lab.—Ah! Monsieur, he is too well bred to act so familiarly with you. He is the best mannered gentleman in all France; although I am his valet, I can say nothing but good of him.

Madam Oronte.—Is he polished? Is he sage?

Lab.—Is he sage, Madam? why, he was raised among the gilded youth of Paris. By gad, he's long-headed.

M. Oron.—And Monsieur Orgon, is he not with him?

Lab.—No, Monsieur, a sharp attack of gout prevented his setting off.

M. Oron.—The poor old fellow!

Lab.—Yes, it seized him suddenly on the eve of our departure—here is a letter he wrote you.

M. Oron.—(Taking the letter and reading the superscription.) "To M. Gabble, Doctor of Medicine, Sepulcher street."

Lab.—(Taking the letter.) Oh! that isn't the one, Monsieur.

M. Oron.—(Laughing.) That doctor resides in the same quarter as his patients.

Lab.—(Drawing from his pockets some letters.) I have several letters to deliver—Let me see. (He reads), "To M. Sputter, lawyer, False-witness street."—Oh! that isn't it. (He reads.) "To M. Gluttonton, canon of"—Pshaw! shall I never find it? (He reads.) "To M. Oronte"—Ah! here's the letter of M. Orgon—his hand trembled so when he wrote that you'll hardly recognize his writing.

M. Oron.—In truth I should not have recognized it.

Lab.—Gout is a terrible disease—may heaven preserve you from it, as well as Madam Oronte, Mademoiselle Angélique, Lisette and all the rest of the company!

M. Oron.—(Opening the letter and reading.) "I was nearly ready to leave with Damis when an attack of gout seized me and prevented. Nevertheless as my presence is not absolutely necessary at Paris, I do not desire my indisposition to retard a marriage so dear to my heart and the sole consolation of my old age. I send you my son; act the father to him as to your daughter. I shall be well content with all you do. From Chartres; Your affectionate friend, Orgon." How I pity him! (Seeing Crispin dressed in Damis' clothes.) But who is this young man coming? Is it perchance Damis?

Lab.—Damis himself. (To Madam Oronte.) What do you think of him, Madam? hasn't he a prepossessing air?

Madam Oron.—Oh! he's fairly attractive.

Enter Crispin.

Crispin.—(To Labranche, pointing to M. Oronte.) Is this M. Oronte, my illustrious father-in-law?

Labranche.—Yes, you see before you the self-same original gentleman.

M. Oronte.—(Throwing his arms around Crispin.) Welcome, thrice welcome, my son, embrace me.

Cris.—(Embracing M. Oronte.) I am extremely joyous to be able to testify my great happiness by embracing you. (Pointing to Madam Oronte.) Doubtless this is the charming girl who is to be given me in marriage.

M. Oron.—No, my son, that is my wife; here is my daughter Angélique.

Cris.—Zounds! What a fine family! I should be quite willing to accept one as wife the other as mistress.

Madam Oronte.—That's too gallant by half! (Whispering to Lisette.) He seems to be a witty fellow, Lisette.

Lis.—(Whispering.) Has good taste, too.

Cris.—(To Madam Oronte.) What air! what grace! what noble presence! by gad! Madam, you are charming—adorable. My father well said: You'll see Madam Oronte, she is the most piquant beauty——

Madam Oron.—Fie! for shame!

Cris.—The most disag—I wish, he said, she were a widow, I'd marry her quick.

M. Oron.—(Laughing.) I'm much obliged to him, I'm sure.

Madam Oron.—(To Crispin.) I esteem your father very highly; how sorry I am he could not come with you.

Cris.—No more sorry than he is, not to be able to come to the wedding. He promised himself the pleasure of dancing with Madam Oronte.

Lab.—(To M. Oronte.) He begs you to end the marriage ceremonies quickly, for he is extremely anxious to have his daughter-in-law near him.

M. Oron.—Well, the conditions are entirely arranged be-

tween us and signed, we've nothing left but to end the thing and count the dowry.

Cris.—Count the dowry?—yes, very well said—Labranche, (to M. Oronte) kindly permit me to give an order to my servant. (To Labranche.) Go to the Marquis—(whispering) skip out and arrange for the horses to-night—you understand me? (aloud) and present my compliments.

Lab.—I fly, sir. (He leaves.)

M. Oron.—(To Crispin.) But to return to your father: I am truly sorry to learn of his indisposition, but satisfy, I pray you, my curiosity: tell me the latest news regarding his law-suit.

Cris.—(Embarrassed, calling.) Labranche.

M. Oron.—You seem much affected; what's the matter?

Cris.—(Aside.) Devil take the question! (To M. Oronte.) I forgot to order Labranche to— (Aside.) He ought to have had sense enough to have spoken of that law-suit.

M. Oron.—Well, has the suit finally come to judgment?

Cris.—Yes, thank God! the thing is ended.

M. Oron.—And you have won?

Cris.—With costs.

M. Oron.—I'm delighted, I assure you.

Madam Oron.—Heaven be praised!

Cris.—My father was all wrapped up in this affair, he would have given all his wealth to the judges, rather than lose it.

M. Oron.—Upon my faith it must have cost him a pretty penny, didn't it?

Cris.—I warrant you. But justice is such a fine thing that it cannot be bought at too high a price.

M. Oron.—I agree with you; but besides the money, this suit must have cost him a lot of trouble?

Cris.—Oh, an inconceivable amount. His adversary was the most quarrelsome and the least reasonable of all men.

M. Oron.—Of all men? what are you talking about? He told me his opponent was a woman.

Cris.—Oh! yes, his opponent was a woman, I grant, but this woman had a certain old Norman, who counselled her: it was this man that gave my father so much trouble—but let's change the subject of our discourse and drop law-suits: I wish to think only of my marriage and the pleasure I feel when looking at Madam Oronte.

M. Oron.—Very well, my son, let us go in. I wish to give my last orders concerning the marriage preparations.

Cris.—(Offering his hand to Madam Oronte.) Madam.

Madam Oron.—(To Angélique.) You are not to be pitied, my daughter; Damis has his good points. (M. and Madam Oronte with Crispin leave.)

Angélique.—Alas! what shall become of me?

Lisette.—Oh! you're about to become the wife of M. Damis: that isn't difficult to guess.

Ang.—(Crying.) Ah! Lisette, you know my feelings, sympathize with me.

Lis.—(Also crying.) My poor child!

Ang.—You will not be so merciless as to abandon me to my fate?

Lis.—You break my heart!

Ang.—Lisette, my dear Lisette.

Lis.—Say no more; I am so affected that I might give you some mischievous advice and you are so vexed that you might follow it.

Enter Valère.

Valère.—(Does not see them.) Crispin told me not to show myself here for several days, because he contemplated a stratagem, but he did not explain its nature and I cannot live in this uncertainty.

Lisette.—(Seeing Valère.) Valère is coming.

Val.—(Seeing Angélique.) I'm not mistaken—it is she. Beautiful Angélique, I pray you, tell me yourself, my destiny: what result may I expect?—but, what! you are both crying?

Lis.—Yes, Monsieur, we weep—and we despair; your rival has come.

Val.—What do I hear?

Lis.—And this very night he marries my mistress.

Val.—Great heavens!

Lis.—If she were only to remain in Paris, after her marriage, it might not be so bad: you could then sometimes weep together over your misfortune; but to crown your woes you will be obliged to weep separately.

Val.—It will kill me—but Lisette, who is this happy rival that carries off all that I have in the world most dear?

Lis.—His name is Damis. He comes from Chartres.

Val.—I know that section of the country well, and I never heard of any Damis except the son of M. Orgon.

Lis.—It is precisely the son of M. Orgon that is your rival.

Val.—Oh! if we have no one but this Damis to fear we may rest easy.

Angélique.—What are you saying, Valère?

Val.—We can stop worrying at once, charming Angélique. Damis was married a week ago at Chartres.

Lis.—Good!

Ang.—You delude yourself, Valère; Damis is here preparing for the marriage.

Lis.—(To Valère.) At this very moment he is in the house with Madam and M. Oronte.

Val.—Damis is one of my friends; less than a week ago he wrote me; I have his letter at home.

Ang.—And what did he tell you?

Val.—That he had secretly married at Chartres a girl of rank.

Lis.—Secretry married? Ho! ho! we must look into this affair a little—it seems to me to be well worth the trouble. Go, Monsieur, go fetch that letter and lose no time.

Val.—I shall be back in a moment. (He leaves.)

Lis.—Now, we must not neglect to use this news, for I'm very much mistaken if we can not reap some advantage from it; 'twill serve at least to delay your marriage awhile. (Seeing M. Oronte.) I see Monsieur Oronte coming. While I am tell-

ing him, you run in and share the tidings with your mother. (Angélique leaves.)

Enter M. Oronte.

M. Oronte.—Valère just left, did he not, Lisette?

Lisette.—Yes, Monsieur. He came to tell us something that, upon my word, will surprise you.

M. Oron.—Well, what?

Lis.—Believe me, this Damis is a pretty fellow, to want two wives, when so many honest men are extremely sorry to have one.

M. Oron.—Explain yourself, Lisette.

Lis.—Damis is married; he secretly married at Chartres a well-born girl.

M. Oron.—Fine news! How can that be, Lisette?

Lis.—Nevertheless, nothing is more true, Monsieur. Damis himself sent the news to Valère, who is one of his friends.

M. Oron.—It's a fairy tale, I tell you.

Lis.—No, Monsieur, I assure you it is not. Valère has gone to get the letter; you can see it for yourself.

M. Oron.—Once more I tell you I cannot believe it.

Lis.—Ah! Monsieur, why cannot you believe it? The young people of to-day, are they not likely to do anything?

M. Oron.—They are more dissolute, it is true, than they were in my time.

Lis.—How do we know that this Damis is not one of those scoundrels on a small scale, who do not scruple to accept a plurality of dowries? However, as he married a girl of rank, the secret wedding is sure to be followed by consequences not at all agreeable to you.

M. Oron.—Still, I suppose what you say might be worth a little attention.

Lis.—What! a little attention? If I were in your place, before I'd trust my daughter in his hands I'd clear up the whole matter.

M. Oron.—Perhaps you're right; but I see his valet coming. I'll slyly sound him. Go, Lisette, and leave me alone with him.

Lis.—(Aside.) May the news be confirmed!

Enter Labranche.

M. Oronte.—Come here, Labranche—come closer. You have every appearance of an honest man.

Labranche.—Oh! Monsieur, without egotism, I am more honest than I appear.

M. Oron.—I'm glad to hear it; listen, your master strikes me as quite a ladies' man.

Lab.—By gad! he's a gay bird! All the women go crazy over him; he has a certain free and easy air which charms them.—Monsieur Orgon, by marrying him, insures the tranquillity of thirty families at the very least.

M. Oron.—As he is that sort of a fellow, I do not wonder that he took advantage of a well-born girl.

Lab.—What's that you say?

M. Oron.—My friend, you must confess the truth. I know everything; I know that Damis is married; and I know that he married a girl at Chartres.

Lab.—(Aside.) Phew!

M. Oron.—Ah! you are confused.—I see I have been told the truth; you are a knave.

Lab.—I a knave, Monsieur?

M. Oron.—Yes, you; you are a scoundrel. I'm fully informed of your scheme and I intend to have you punished as an accomplice.

Lab.—What scheme, Monsieur? May I die if I understand——

M. Oron.—You feign ignorance, you rascal; but if you do not immediately make a clean breast of the whole thing, I shall turn you over to the officers of justice.

Lab.—Do as you please, Monsieur, I have nothing to confess. I rack my brains in vain; I cannot imagine what cause for complaint you could have against me.

M. Oron.—Ah! then you are not willing to confess? Hello there! someone—bring me an officer.

Lab.—Wait, Monsieur, not so loud. Entirely innocent as I am, you assume an air that embarrasses me. Come, let us coolly straighten out the matter. Now, who told you that my master was married?

M. Oron.—Who? he told it himself, in a letter to one of his friends, Valère.

Lab.—To Valère, you say?

M. Oron.—Yes, to Valère. What do you say to that?

Lab.—(Laughing.) Nothing. By gad! the trick is clever. (Aside.) Ah! ah! Valère you didn't hit it so badly that time, upon my word!

M. Oron.—Trick? What do you mean by trick?

Lab.—(Laughing.) We were told that sooner or later he'd settle our goose, nor has he failed to try, as you see.

M. Oron.—I see nothing.

Lab.—Oh! you will see; you'll see. In the first place, I wish to inform you that this Valère loves your daughter.

M. Oron.—I am well acquainted with the fact.

Lab.—Lisette promotes his interests; she shares all the plans to make his suit succeed. I'll wager something handsome that it was she that spread this false report. Didn't she tell you?

M. Oron.—She did, it is true.

Lab.—In the confusion which the arrival of my master has thrown them both, what have they done? Simply spread the report that Damis is married. Valère even goes so far as to show a letter supposed to have been received from my master, and all intended, as you can easily see, to defer the marriage of Angélique.

M. Oron.—(Aside.) What he says seems reasonable.

Lab.—And while you are running down this false report, Lisette will win the confidence of her mistress and lead her to take some false step; after which, of course, you cannot longer refuse her to Valère.

M. Oron.—(Aside.) Ho! ho! this reasoning sounds sensible.

Lab.—But, by gad! the biters will be bitten. M. Oronte

is a man of sound intelligence, a man of parts who will not permit himself to be played upon in this manner.

M. Oron.—No, I guess not.

Lab.—You know all the artful dodges, all the wiles and tricks that a lover puts in practice to supplant his rival?

M. Oron.—I warrant you I see plainly that your master is not married. Yet I must admire Valère's clever rascality; he claims to be an intimate friend of Damis, but I wager they do not even know each other.

Lab.—Doubtless—by gad! Monsieur, but you have a penetrating mind; nothing escapes you.

M. Oron.—I'm seldom, very seldom deceived in my conjectures—but I see your master, I shall laugh with him over this pretended marriage. (Laughing.) Ha! ha! ha!

Lab.—(Also laughing.) Ha! ha! ha! ha!

Enter Crispin.

M. Oronte.—(To Crispin.) You little know, my son, what they say of you. My, what a joke! They tell me you are married beyond the shadow of a doubt; that you secretly wedded a girl at Chartres. Ha! ha! ha! isn't that funny?

Labranche.—(Making signs to Crispin.) Ha! ha! ha! ha! nothing funnier.

Crispin.—Ho! ho! ho! ho! never heard anything so funny in my life.

M. Oron.—Another, I've no doubt, would have been foolish enough to have been taken in, but I—well, I guess not.

Lab.—Oh! the devil! M. Oronte is as sharp as a needle.

Cris.—I should like to learn the author of this ridiculous report.

Lab.—Monsieur says that it is a man named Valère.

Cris.—(As though astonished.) Valère? Who is this fellow Valère?

Lab.—(To M. Oronte.) You can plainly see, Monsieur, that he doesn't know him. (To Crispin.) That's the man you know, pard—pardon, perhaps you don't know, who we've been told is your rival.

Cris.—Oh! yes, yes, I remember now; the fellow who is distinguished by small means and large debts, but who has drawn a bead on M. Oronte's daughter and whose creditors are spending their days and nights on their knees, praying for their debtor's success.

M. Oron.—They'll wait, I'll warrant you, they'll wait.

Lab.—He's no fool, this Valère, by gad! he's no fool!

M. Oron.—I'm no blockhead myself, not much, egad—no blockhead, and to prove it I'll go at once to my notary. (He starts to leave, but returns.) Or rather, Damis, I've a new proposition to make you. I agreed with M. Orgon, I admit, to give you twenty thousand francs cash down; but won't you take, instead of this sum, my house in the faubourg Saint-Germain; it cost me a third more to build.

Cris.—Oh! I'm an unusually taking man, I'm told; but between ourselves I'd rather have the ready cash.

Lab.—(To M. Oronte.) The cash, you know, is more portable.

M. Oron.—Assuredly.

Cris.—Yes, you can put it in a valise easier. In truth, there is a farm to be sold near Chartres that I'm very anxious to buy.

Lab.—(To M. Oronte.) Ah! Monsieur, a great bargain. Should you see it you would be charmed.

Cris.—I can get it for twenty-five thousand francs, and I have been assured that it is well worth sixty thousand.

Lab.—At the very least, Monsieur, at the very least; why, without mentioning anything else, there are two ponds on the place where each year they catch fully two thousand francs' worth of suckers.

M. Oron.—(To Crispin.) You must not let such a fine bargain escape. Listen: I have at my notary's fifty thousand francs that I have held in reserve to buy the country-seat of a certain financier who will shortly drop out of sight. I'll give you half.

Cris.—Ah! what generosity! Monsieur Oronte, I shall never forget your kindness: eternal gratitude—my heart—in short, I am so deeply moved——

Lab.—Monsieur Oronte is the phœnix of father's-in-law.

M. Oron.—I'll leave you now to get the money—but first I'll go in the house and tell my wife.

Cris.—Valère's creditors will hang themselves.

M. Oron.—Let them hang! You shall marry my daughter within an hour.

Cris.—(Laughing.) Ha! ha! ha! that will be a capital joke!

Lab.—Yes, yes, very droll indeed! (M. Oronte leaves.)

Cris.—My master must have had an explanation with Angélique, and moreover must be acquainted with Damis.

Lab.—So well acquainted that they write, as you see; but thanks to my care, Monsieur Oronte is prejudiced against Valère, and I trust that we shall have the dowry in our saddle-bags before the old fellow is undeceived.

Cris.—(Seeing Valère coming.) Oh heavens!

Lab.—What's the matter Crispin?

Cris.—My master is coming here.

Lab.—How badly timed for us!

Enter Valère.

Valère.—(At the rear, holding a letter in his hand.) I can with this letter enter Monsieur Oronte's house. (Seeing Crispin whom at first he does not recognize.) But I see a young man. Could it be Damis? I'll go nearer and discover—great heavens! it's Crispin.

Crispin.—Crispin himself. But what the devil are you doing here? Didn't I forbid you to go near the house of Monsieur Oronte? You will destroy all that my clever work has done for you.

Val.—There is no necessity to employ any stratagem for me, my dear Crispin.

Cris.—Why not?

Val.—I know the name of my rival: it is Damis, and I have nothing to fear, for he is married.

Cris.—Damis married? (Pointing to Labranche.) But stop, Monsieur, here is his valet, whom I have interested in your affair, he'll tell you about Damis.

Val.—Can it be possible that he has not written the truth. Then to gain what end did he write me these lines: (He reads.)

"From Chartres.

"I must inform you, my dear friend, that I was married quite recently in this city. I wedded secretly a girl of good family. I shall soon leave for Paris, where I promise you shall learn from my own lips the full details of this marriage.

"DAMIS."

Lab.—Ah, Monsieur, I'm well acquainted with this circumstance. At the time my master wrote you this letter he had in fact mapped out a marriage, but M. Orgon didn't approve the map and gave a considerable sum to the father of the girl to hush the matter up.

Val.—Then Damis is not married?

Lab.—Not much.

Val.—Ah! my good fellows, I implore your help. (To Crispin.) What enterprise have you undertaken, Crispin? You didn't seem willing to inform me when I asked you not long ago. Keep me no longer in this uncertainty. But why this disguise? What do you mean to do for me?

Cris.—Your rival has not yet arrived at Paris; he will not be here for a couple of days; before this time I hope to disgust M. and Madam Oronte with the alliance.

Val.—In what way?

Cris.—By passing as Damis. I have already done many extravagant things; I talk utter nonsense. My ridiculous actions shock constantly the father and mother of Angélique. You know the character of Madam Oronte; she loves flattery; well, I disparage her in language which a man about town would scarcely use to one of the frail sisterhood.

Val.—So far, so good—and?

Cris.—And I shall continue to do and to say so many foolish things that before night I mean to be driven from their house—then they'll resolve to give you Angélique.

Val.—Does Lisette enter into this scheme?

Cris.—Yes, Monsieur, we work hand in hand.

Val.—Ah! Crispin, what do I not owe you?

Cris.—(Pointing to Labranche.) Ask, just for fun, that fellow, if I play my part well.

Lab.—(To Valère.) Ah! Monsieur, you certainly have an adroit servant. He is the cleverest rascal in Paris—he compels my praise. Nor do I in truth back him up so badly either; if our enterprise succeeds you will owe no less obligation to me than to him.

Val.—You may both depend upon my gratitude; I promise you——

Cris.—Ah! Monsieur, no promises now; think, if you are seen with us all will be lost. Leave us quickly and, above all, do not show yourself here to-day.

Val.—I leave then, as you wish—good-bye, my friends; I rely on your judgment.

Lab.—Let your mind rest easy, Monsieur; retire quickly and abandon your fortune to us.

Val.—Remember that my fate——

Cris.—(Aside.) What a deluge of words!

Val.—Depends upon you.

Cris.—(Pushing him.) Go at once, I tell you. (Valère leaves.)

Lab.—He's gone at last.

Cris.—Once more I breathe freely.

Lab.—Well, we had a good scare. My heart was in my mouth for fear that M. Oronte might surprise us with your master.

Cris.—I feared that also—but as that is the only danger, we are now assured that our project will succeed. At present we can choose our route. Have you hired the horses for to-night?

Lab.—(Looking in the distance.) Yes.

Cris.—Good! In my opinion we had better take the Flanders road.

Lab.—(Still intently looking in the distance, abstractedly.)

The Flanders road?—Yes, that's well chosen; I'm for the Flanders road, too.

Cris.—But what are you looking at so attentively?

Lab.—I'm looking at—yes—no—heavens and earth! can it be—alas! it's his figure.

Cris.—Whose figure?

Lab.—Crispin, my poor Crispin, it is M. Orgon!

Cris.—The father of Damis?

Lab.—Himself.

Cris.—The cussed old man!

Lab.—I believe the whole infernal regions are leagued together to prevent our getting the dowry.

Cris.—He comes here—he will enter M. Oronte's house and all will be discovered.

Lab.—That is what I must prevent if possible. Go, await me at the inn—what I fear most is that M. Oronte may come out while I am talking. (Crispin leaves.)

Enter M. Orgon.

M. Orgon.—(He does not see Labranche.) I do not know what sort of a reception M. and Madam Oronte will accord me.

Lab.—(Aside.) You're not there yet. (Aloud.) Your servant, M. Orgon.

M. Org.—Ah! I didn't see you, Labranche.

Lab.—What! Monsieur, you surprise people this way? Who would have thought you were at Paris?

M. Org.—I left Chartres shortly after you, because on second thought I decided to speak to M. Oronte myself—that perhaps it was not courteous to withdraw my word through a valet.

Lab.—You have a very delicate sense of what is fitting, it seems to me. You intend then to call on M. and Madam Oronte yourself?

M. Org.—That is my intention.

Lab.—Then thank your good stars that you met me in time to prevent you.

M. Org.—Why, have you already seen them, Labranche?

Lab.—Oh yes, by gad! I've seen them. I come from there; Madam Oronte is terribly angry with you.

M. Org.—Angry with me?

Lab.—With you.—What! she said, M. Orgon breaks his word; who would have believed it? My daughter. then, must henceforth give up all hope of marriage.

M. Org.—But how will that prevent her marrying?

Lab.—That's what I asked; but can you expect an angry woman to listen to reason? That's as much as she can do when she's calm. She argues like a shopkeeper's wife—the world will not believe, she told me, that Damis has been obliged to marry a girl at Chartres. We shall soon hear that M. Orgon has thoroughly examined our means and finding them scanty has withdrawn his word.

M. Org.—For shame! can she imagine that people will say that?

Lab.—You would not believe to how great an extent fury has taken the place of reason.—Her eyes are sunken—she knows no one—she clutched me by the throat and I had a hard time to tear myself from her grasp.

M. Org.—And M. Oronte?

Lab.—Oh, as to M. Oronte, I found him much more moderate—he only slapped my face a couple of times.

M. Org.—You astonish me, Labranche. I little thought them given to such fits of passion. Ought they to blame me, because I consented to the marriage of my son? Did you not explain all the circumstances?

Lab.—Pardon me. I told them that your son, commencing where others ordinarily end; and that the family of your daughter-in-law were preparing to bring an action against you, when you wisely staved it off by uniting the parties.

M. Org.—And they weren't satisfied with this reason?

Lab.—Satisfied? You'll be satisfied if they get hold of you! Take my word for it, Monsieur, and return to Chartres immediately.

M. Org.—(About to enter M. Oronte's house.) No, La-

branche, I wish to see them and to represent the thing so clearly that——

Lab.—(Pulling him back.) You shall not enter, Monsieur; I assure you I cannot permit you to go where you are sure to be disfigured. If you have definitely decided to speak to them, wait until the heat of their passion has cooled.

M. Org.—That's sensible.

Lab.—Put off your visit until to-morrow; they will be better disposed to receive you.

M. Org.—You are right, they will be less violent. I shall follow your advice.

Lab.—However, Monsieur, do as you please; you, of course, are master.

M. Org.—No, no,—come, Labranche; I'll see them to-morrow.

Lab.—I'll follow in your footsteps. (M. Orgon leaves.) (Alone.) Or rather I'll go to Crispin.—At last we've surmounted all obstacles.—For me, however, there remains a little scruple regarding the dowry—it's hardly fair to share it with an associate, for, as my master cannot have Angélique, it seems to me that I should by right have the entire dowry—but how can I impose on Crispin?—I'll counsel him to spend the night with his bride—he loves her and is just the man to follow that sort of advice.—While he is trifling his time away, I'll decamp with the essential—but, no, I had better reject this plan and not open war upon a man as clever as myself—it might easily happen that some day he'd get his revenge. Besides, it would be contrary to our laws, for we rascals are more faithful to each other than are honest people.—But, here is M. Oronte, who is going to see his notary.—How fortunate to be rid of M. Orgon! (He leaves.)

Enter M. Oronte and Lisette.

Lisette.—Again I tell you, Monsieur, that Valère is an honest man and that you ought to thoroughly investigate——

M. Oronte.—I have already investigated, only too deeply, Lisette. I know that you are working in the interest of Valère, and I blush to think that both of you together were

not able to invent a more ingenious expedient to force me to defer the marriage.

Lis.—What! Monsieur, you imagine?

M. Oron.—No, Lisette, I imagine nothing; I'm easy to deceive; I am—the most stupid blockhead in the world.—Go, Lisette, go tell Valère that he shall never be my son-in-law—that's what he can assure his creditors. (He leaves.)

Lis.—(Alone.) Phew! what does all this mean? It's more than I can fathom.

Enter Valère.

Valère.—(He does not see Lisette.) Notwithstanding Crispin's warning, I cannot content myself to calmly await the success of his artifice. After all, I do not know why he recommended me so strongly not to show myself here, for indeed in place of injuring his scheme, I might aid it.

Lisette.—Ah! Monsieur, you have been gone a long time; where is Damis' letter?

Val.—Here it is—but, of course, it's of no use.—Rather, tell me, Lisette, how is the scheme getting on?

Lis.—Scheme? What scheme?

Val.—The one imagined by Crispin to help my suit.

Lis.—Crispin? Who's Crispin?

Val.—Confound it! he's my valet.

Lis.—I don't know him.

Val.—Now this is pushing dissimulation a little too far, Lisette. Crispin told me that you and he were working hand in hand.

Lis.—I don't know what you're talking about, Monsieur.

Val.—This is too much; I lose all patience with you.

Enter Madam Oronte and Angélique.

Madam Oronte.—I'm pleased to see you, Valère; I must reproach you. Ought an honorable man to forge letters?

Valère.—Forge? I, Madam? Who could have told you such an evil thing of me?

Lisette.—(To Madam Oronte.) Oh! Madam, M. Valère has

forged nothing; there has been some trickery.—But here is M. Oronte returning and M. Orgon with him. Now everything will be explained.

Enter MM. Oronte and Orgon.

M. Oronte.—You may be sure there's rascality in it, M. Orgon.

M. Orgon.—That's just what we must clear up, M. Oronte.

M. Oron.—(To his wife.) I met M. Orgon while on my way to the notary; he has come, he tells me, to Paris to withdraw his word; Damis is really married.

Angélique.—(Aside.) What do I hear?

M. Org.—(To Madam Oronte.) It is true, Madam, and when you learn all the circumstances of this marriage you will excuse——

M. Oron.—(To his wife.) M. Orgon was not able to withhold his consent; but what I cannot comprehend is, that he assures me his son is at this very moment in Chartres.

M. Org.—Undoubtedly.

Madam Oronte.—There is a young man here, however, who claims to be your son.

M. Org.—He is an impostor.

M. Oron.—And Labranche, the same valet you brought with you a couple of weeks ago, calls him master.

M. Org.—Labranche, you say! Ah! the scoundrel. Now I am no longer surprised that a few moments ago he prevented me from entering your house. He told me that both of you were frightfully angry with me and that you had abused him.

Madam Oron.—The liar.

Lisette.—(Aside.) I see the trick, or am not far off, at least.

Valère.—(Aside.) That traitor! has he played me false?

M. Oron.—We'll get to the bottom of it now, for here they come.

Enter Crispin and Labranche.

Crispin.—(To M. Oronte.) Well, M. Oronte, is everything ready?—Our marriage— (Seeing Valère and M. Orgon.) Phew! what do I see?

Labranche.—(Low, to Crispin.) By gad! we are discovered. Let us save our skins.

Valère.—Oh! you'll not escape us so easily, you villains; and you shall get your deserts, too. (Valère grabs Crispin by the collar and MM. Oronte and Orgon seize Labranche.)

M. Oronte.—Ah! we have you fast, knaves.

M. Orgon.—(To Labranche.) Tell me, rascal, who is this other scoundrel that you passed off for Damis?

Val.—He is my valet.

Madam Oronte.—A valet? great heavens! a valet!

Val.—A traitor who makes me believe he is working in my interest, while in reality to deceive me he employs the vilest artifice.

Cris.—Gently, Monsieur, gently, do not judge by appearances.

M. Org.—(To Labranche.) And you, rogue, is this the way you fulfill the commands I intrust to you?

Labranche.—Go slowly, Monsieur, slowly; look well before you leap, if you please, and do not condemn people unheard.

M. Org.—What, would you dare to sustain that you are not a past-master in villainry?

Lab.—(Feigning to cry.) Now I'm a villain! very good! See what kindness one can receive for serving with affection!

Val.—(To Crispin.) Nor do you acknowledge more than he, I suppose, that you are a reprobate and a scamp?

Cris.—(Angrily.) Reprobate! scamp! The devil! Monsieur, but you are prodigal with epithets which do not fit me at all.

Val.—Besides, we do you the great wrong to suspect your fidelity, traitors!

M. Oron.—What have you to say to justify yourselves, wretches?

Lab.—Well, here's Crispin who'll at once rid you of your error.

Cris.—Labranche will explain the thing in two words.

Lab.—Speak, Crispin, and make our innocence clear.

Cris.—Speak yourself, Labranche, you shall soon disabuse their minds.

Lab.—No, no, you can unravel it better, I'm sure.

Cris.—(To M. Oronte and Valère.) Very well, Messieurs, I shall tell you the thing exactly as it happened. I took the name of Damis to disgust by my ridiculous airs M. and Madam Oronte and to favorably dispose them in this way to my master's marriage; but in place of shocking them by my impertinent manners, I have been so unfortunate as to please. It's not my fault; I couldn't help it.

M. Oron.—However, if we had let you alone, you would have carried your feint to the extent of marrying my daughter.

Cris.—No, Monsieur; ask Labranche; we came here expressly to confess the whole thing.

Val.—You cannot paint your perfidy in colors that will dazzle our eyes. Since Damis is married it was useless for Crispin to impersonate him.

Cris.—Very well, Messieurs; since you are not willing to acquit us as innocent persons, pray pardon us as guilty ones. We implore your forgiveness. (He drops on his knees before M. Oronte.)

Lab.—(Dropping on his knees also.) We petition your compassion.

Cris.—(To M. Oronte.) Frankly, the dowry tempted us. We are accustomed to fleecing people. Pardon us on the grounds of habit.

M. Oron.—No, no, your audacity shall not remain unpunished.

Lab.—Ah! Monsieur, be merciful; we implore it by the beaming eyes of Madam Oronte.

Cris.—By the tenderness you must feel for such a charming wife.

Madam Oron.—(To her husband.) These poor fellows move me to pity. I beg mercy for them.

Lisette.—(Aside.) What clever rascals they are!

M. Org.—You are very fortunate scamps, since Madam Oronte intercedes for you.

M. Oron.—I was strongly tempted to punish you, but as my wife desires it, we'll let bygones be bygones. Besides, I give to-day my daughter to Valère, and we must think only of rejoicing.—You are pardoned and, moreover, if you will promise to mend your ways I'll charge myself to better your condition.

Cris.—(Rising.) Oh! Monsieur, we sincerely promise.

Lab.—(Rising also.) Yes, Monsieur, we are so mortified not to have succeeded in our enterprise that we renounce rascality of every kind.

M. Oron.—You are clever, but you must make better use of your gifts; to make you both honest people I'll help you on.—I'll obtain for you, Labranche, a good commission.

Lab.—I guarantee, Monsieur, my willingness.

M. Oron.—(To Crispin.) And for the valet of my son-in-law I'll obtain in marriage the god-daughter of a farmer I know.

Cris.—I'll endeavor, Monsieur, by my complaisance to merit my god-father's kindness.

M. Oron.—We'll not remain here any longer, but go in. I trust that M. Orgon will honor with his presence my daughter's wedding.

M. Org.—Yes, for I wish to dance with Madam Oronte.

MAHOMET

BY VOLTAIRE.

(Translated by Oliver Leigh.)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MAHOMET.

ZOPIR, Sheik of Mecca.

OMAR, General and second in command to Mahomet.

SEID, } *Slaves to Mahomet.*

PALMIRA, }

PHANOR, Senator of Mecca.

COMPANY OF MECCANS.

COMPANY OF MUSSULMANS.

SCENE—MECCA.

Mahomet.

PRELUDE.

Under guise of an attack on Mahomet and his faith, Voltaire, in his drama which bears that name, attacks every form of religion, though there is doubtless truth in what he says in his dedication to Frederick of Prussia, "The love of mankind and the hatred of fanaticism, two virtues which adorn your throne, guided my pen." After comparing his work with *Tartuffe* and claiming the right to expose in tragedy, as in comedy, "that species of imposture which sets to work the hypocrisy of some and the madness of others," he describes in detail the horrors of his theme. But these it will be better to leave for the author to unfold in his own lines. It is worthy of note that Pope Benedict XIV, to whom Voltaire addressed a later dedication of his work, replied by pronouncing it "an excellent tragedy, which I have read with much pleasure."

ACT I. SCENE I.

Zopir, Phanor.

Zopir.—Thinkest thou thy friend will ever bend the knee
To this proud hypocrite; shall I fall down

And worship, I who banished him from Mecca?
No: punish me, just heaven, as I deserve,
If e'er this hand, the friend of innocence
And freedom, stoop to cherish foul rebellion,
Or aid imposture to deceive mankind!

Phanor.—Thy zeal is noble, and becomes the chief
Of Ishmael's sacred senate, but may prove
Destructive to the cause it means to serve:
Thy ardor cannot check the rapid power
Of Mahomet, and but provokes his vengeance:
There was a time when you might safely draw
The sword of justice, to defend the rights
Of Mecca, and prevent the flames of war
From spreading o'er the land; then Mahomet
Was but a bold and factious citizen,
But now he is a conqueror, and a king;
Mecca's impostor at Medina shines
A holy prophet; nations bend before him,
And learn to worship crimes which we abhor.
Even here, a band of wild enthusiasts, drunk
With furious zeal, support his fond delusions,
His idle tales, and fancied miracles:
These spread sedition through the gaping throng,
Invite his forces, and believe a God
Inspires and renders him invincible.
The lovers of their country think with you,
But wisest counsels are not always followed;
False zeal, and fear, and love of novelty
Alarm the crowd; already half our city
Is left unpeopled; Mecca cries aloud
To thee, her father, and demands a peace.

Zop.—Peace with a traitor! coward nation, what
Can you expect but slavery from a tyrant!
Go, bend your supple knees, and prostrate fall
Before the idol whose oppressive hand
Shall crush you all: for me, I hate the traitor;
This heart's too deeply wounded to forgive:
The savage murderer robbed me of a wife
And two dear children: nor is his resentment

Less fierce than mine; I forced his camp, pursued
The coward to his tent, and slew his son:
The torch of hatred is lit up between us,
And time can never extinguish it.

Pha.— I hope
It never will; yet thou shouldst hide the flame,
And sacrifice thy griefs to public good:
What if he lay this noble city waste,
Will that avenge thee, will that serve thy cause?
Thou hast lost all, son, brother, daughter, wife.
Mecca alone remains to give thee comfort,
Do not lose that, do not destroy thy country.

Zop.—Kingdoms are lost by cowardice alone.

Pha.—As oft perhaps by obstinate resistance.

Zop.—Then let us perish, if it be our fate.

Pha.—When thou art almost in the harbor, thus
To brave the storm is false and fatal courage:
Kind heaven, thou seest, points out to thee the means
To soften this proud tyrant; fair Palmira,
Thy beauteous captive, brought up in the camp
Of this destructive conqueror, was sent
By gracious heaven, the messenger of peace,
Thy guardian angel, to appease the wrath
Of Mahomet; already by his herald
He has demanded her.

Zop.— And wouldst thou have me
Give up so fair a prize to this barbarian?
What! whilst the tyrant spreads destruction round him,
Unpeoples kingdoms, and destroys mankind,
Shall beauty's charms be sacrificed to bribe
A madman's frenzy? I should envy him
That lovely fair one more than all his glory;
Not that I feel the stings of wild desire,
Or, in the evening of my days, indulge,
Old as I am, a shameless passion for her;
But, whether objects born like her to please,
Spite of ourselves, demand our tenderest pity,
Or that perhaps a childless father hopes

To find in her another daughter, why
I know not, but for that unhappy maid
Still am I anxious; be it weakness in me,
Or reason's powerful voice, I cannot bear
To see her in the hands of Mahomet;
Would I could mould her to my wishes, form
Her willing mind, and make her hate the tyrant
As I do! She has sent to speak with me
Here in the sacred porch—and lo! she comes:
On her fair cheek the blush of modesty
And candor speaks the virtues of her heart.

SCENE II.

Zopir, Palmira.

Zopir.—Hail, lovely maid! the chance of cruel war
Hath made thee Zopir's captive, but thou art not
Amongst barbarians; all with me revere
Palmira's virtues, and lament her fate,
Whilst youth with innocence and beauty plead
Thy cause; whatever thou askest in Zopir's power,
Thou shalt not ask in vain: my life declines
Toward its period, and if my last hours
Can give Palmira joy, I shall esteem them
The best, the happiest I have ever known.

Palmira.—These two months past, my lord, your prisoner here,
Scarce have I felt the yoke of slavery;
Your generous hand, still raised to soothe affliction,
Hath wiped the tears of sorrow from my eyes,
And softened all the rigor of my fate:
Forgive me, if emboldened by your goodness
I ask for more, and centre every hope
Of future happiness on you alone;
Forgive me, if to Mahomet's request
I join Palmira's, and implore that freedom
He hath already asked: O listen to him,
And let me say, that after heaven and him
I am indebted most to generous Zopir.

Zop.—Has then oppression such enticing charms
That thou shouldst wish and beg to be the slave
Of Mahomet, to hear the clash of arms,
With him to live in deserts, and in caves,
And wander o'er his ever shifting country?

Pal.—Where'er the mind with ease and pleasure dwells,
There is our home, and there our native country:
He formed my soul; to Mahomet I owe
The kind instruction of my earlier years;
Taught by the happy partners of his bed,
Who still adoring and adored by him
Send up their prayers to heaven for his dear safety,
I lived in peace and joy! for ne'er did woe
Pollute that seat of bliss till the sad hour
Of my misfortune, when wide-wasting war
Rushed in upon us and enslaved Palmira:
Pity, my lord, a heart oppressed with grief,
That sighs for objects far, far distant from her.

Zop.—I understand you, madame; you expect
The tyrant's hand, and hope to share his throne.

Pal.—I honor him, my lord; my trembling soul
Looks up to Mahomet with holy fear
As to a god; but never did this heart
E'er cherish the vain hope that he would deign
To wed Palmira: No: such splendor ill
Would suit my humble state.

Zop.— Whoe'er thou art,
He was not born, I trust, to be thy husband,
No, nor thy master; much I err, or thou
Springest from a race designed by heaven to check
This haughty Arab, and give laws to him
Who thus assumes the majesty of kings.

Pal.—Alas! we know not what it is to boast
Of birth or fortune; from our infant years
Without or parents, friends, or country, doomed
To slavery; here resigned to our hard fate,
Strangers to all but to that God we serve,
We live content in humble poverty.

Zop.—And can ye be content? and are ye strangers,

Without a father, and without a home?
I am a childless, poor, forlorn, old man;
You might have been the comfort of my age:
To form a plan of future happiness
For you, had softened my own wretchedness,
And made me some amends for all my wrongs:
But you abhor my country and my law.

Pal.—I am not mistress of myself, and how
Can I be thine? I pity thy misfortunes,
And bless thee for thy goodness to Palmira;
But Mahomet has been a father to me.

Zop.—A father! ye just gods! the vile impostor!

Pal.—Can he deserve that name, the holy prophet,
The great ambassador of heaven, sent down
To interpret its high will?

Zop.— Deluded mortals!
How blind ye are, to follow this proud madman,
This happy robber, whom my justice spared,
And raise him from the scaffold to a throne!

Pal.—My lord, I shudder at your imprecations;
Though I am bound by honor and the ties
Of gratitude to love thee for thy bounties,
This blasphemy against my kind protector
Cancels the bond, and fills my soul with horror.
O superstition, how thy savage power
Deprives at once the best and tenderest hearts
Of their humanity!

Zop.— Alas! Palmira,
Spite of myself, I feel for thy misfortunes,
Pity thy weakness, and lament thy fate.

Pal.—You will not grant me then——

Zop.— I cannot yield thee
To him who has deceived thy easy heart,
To a base tyrant; No: thou art a treasure
Too precious to be parted with, and makest
This hypocrite but more detested.

SCENE III.

Zopir, Palmira, Phanor.

Zopir.— Phanor,
What wouldst thou?

Phanor.— At the city gate that leads
To Moad's fertile plain, the valiant Omar
Is just arrived.

Zop.— Indeed; the tyrant's friend,
The fierce, vindictive Omar, his new convert,
Who had so long opposed him, and still fought
For us!

Pha.— Perhaps he yet may serve his country,
Already he hath offered terms of peace;
Our chiefs have parleyed with him, he demands
An hostage, and I hear they've granted him
The noble Seid.

Palmira.— Seid? gracious heaven!

Pha.—Behold! my lord, he comes.

Zop.— Ha! Omar here!
There's no retreating now, he must be heard;
Palmira, you may leave us.—O ye gods
Of my forefathers, you who have protected
The sons of Ishmael these three thousand years,
And thou, O Sun, with all those sacred lights
That glitter round us, witness to my truth,
Aid and support me in the glorious conflict
With proud iniquity!

SCENE IV.

Zopir, Omar, Phanor, Attendants.

Zopir.— At length, it seems,
Omar returns, after a three years' absence,
To visit that loved country which his hand
So long defended, and his honest heart
Has now betrayed: deserter of our gods,

Deserter of our laws, how darest thou thus
Approach these sacred walls to persecute
And to oppress; a public robber's slave;
What is thy errand? wherefore comest thou hither?

Omar.—To pardon thee: by me our holy prophet,
In pity to thy age, thy well-known valor,
And past misfortunes, offers thee his hand:
Omar is come to bring thee terms of peace.

Zop.—And shall a factious rebel offer peace
Who should have sued for pardon? gracious gods!
Will ye permit him to usurp your power,
And suffer Mahomet to rule mankind?
Dost thou not blush, vile minion as thou art,
To serve a traitor? hast thou not beheld him
Friendless and poor, an humble citizen,
And ranking with the meanest of the throng?
How little then in fortune or in fame!

Omar.—Thus low and grovelling souls like thine pretend
To judge of merit, whilst in fortune's scale
Ye weigh the worth of men: proud, empty being,
Dost thou not know that the poor worm which crawls
Low on the earth, and the imperial eagle
That soars to heaven, in the all-seeing eye
Of their eternal Maker are the same,
And shrink to nothing? men are equal all;
From virtue only true distinction springs,
And not from birth: there are exalted spirits
Who claim respect and honor from themselves
And not their ancestors: these, these, my lord,
Are heaven's peculiar care, and such is he
Whom I obey, and who alone deserves
To be a master; all mankind like me
Shall one day fall before the conqueror's feet,
And future ages follow my example.

Zop.—Omar, I know thee well; thy artful hand
In vain hath drawn the visionary portrait;
Thou mayest deceive the multitude, but know,
What Mecca worships Zopir can despise:
Be honest then, and with the impartial eye

Of reason look on Mahomet; behold him
But as a mortal, and consider well
By what base arts the vile impostor rose,
A camel-driver, a poor abject slave,
Who first deceived a fond, believing woman,
And now supported by an idle dream
Draws in the weak and credulous multitude:
Condemned to exile, I chastised the rebel
Too lightly, and his insolence returns
With double force to punish my indulgence.
He fled with Fatima from cave to cave,
And suffered chains, contempt and banishment;
Meantime the fury which he called divine
Spread like a subtle poison through the crowd;
Medina was infected: Omar then,
To reason's voice attentive, would have stopped
The impetuous torrent; he had courage then
And virtue to attack the proud usurper,
Though now he crouches to him like a slave.
If thy proud master be indeed a prophet,
How didst thou dare to punish him? or why,
If an impostor, wilt thou dare to serve him?

Omar.—I punished him because I knew him not;
But now, the veil of ignorance removed,
I see him as he is; behold him born
To change the astonished world, and rule mankind;
When I beheld him rise in awful pomp,
Intrepid, eloquent, by all admired,
By all adored; beheld him speak and act,
Punish and pardon like a god, I lent
My little aid, and joined the conqueror.
Altars, thou knowest, and thrones were our reward;
Once I was blind, like thee, but, thanks to heaven!
My eyes are opened now; would, Zopir, thine
Were open, too! let me entreat thee, change,
As I have done; no longer boast thy zeal
And cruel hatred, nor blaspheme our God,
But fall submissive at the hero's feet
Whom thou hast injured; kiss the hand that bears
The angry lightning, lest it fall upon thee.

Omar is now the second of mankind;
A place of honor yet remains for thee,
If prudent thou wilt yield, and own a master:
What we have been thou knowest, and what we are:
The multitude are ever weak and blind,
Made for our use, born but to serve the great,
But to admire, believe us, and obey:
Reign then with us, partake the feast of grandeur,
No longer deign to imitate the crowd,
But henceforth make them tremble.

Zop.— Tremble thou,
And Mahomet, with all thy hateful train:
Thinkest thou that Mecca's faithful chief will fall
At an impostor's feet, and crown a rebel?
I am no stranger to his specious worth;
His courage and his conduct have my praise;
Were he but virtuous I like thee should love him;
But as he is I hate the tyrant: hence,
Nor talk to me of his deceitful mercy,
His clemency and goodness; all his aim
Is cruelty and vengeance: with this hand
I slew his darling son; I banished him:
My hatred is inflexible, and so
Is Mahomet's resentment: if he e'er
Reënters Mecca, he must cut his way
Through Zopir's blood, for he is deeply stained
With crimes that justice never can forgive.

Omar.—To show thee Mahomet is merciful,
That he can pardon though thou canst not, here
I offer thee the third of all our spoils
Which we have taken from tributary kings;
Name your conditions, and the terms of peace;
Set your own terms on fair Palmira; take
Our treasures, and be happy.

Zop.— Thinkest thou Zopir
Will basely sell his honor and his country,
Will blast his name with infamy for wealth,
The foul reward of guilt, or that Palmira
Will ever own a tyrant for her master?

She is too virtuous e'er to be the slave
Of Mahomet, nor will I suffer her
To fall a sacrifice to base impostors
Who would subvert the laws, and undermine
The safety and the virtue of mankind.

Omar.—Implacably severe; thou talkest to Omar
As if he were a criminal, and thou
His judge; but henceforth I would have thee act
A better part, and treat me as a friend,
As the ambassador of Mahomet,
A conqueror and a king.

Zop.— A king! who made,
Who crowned him?

Omar.— Victory: respect his glory,
And tremble at his power: amidst his conquests
The hero offers peace; our swords are still
Unsheathed, and woe to this rebellious city
If she submits not: think what blood must flow,
The blood of half our fellow-citizens;
Consider, Zopir, Mahomet is here,
And even now requests to speak with thee.

Zop.—Ha! Mahomet!

Omar.— Yes, he conjures thee.

Zop.— Traitor!
Were I the sole despotic ruler here
He should be answered soon—by chastisement.

Omar.—I pity, Zopir, thy pretended virtue;
But since the senate insolently claim
Divided empire with thee, to the senate
Let us begone; Omar will meet thee there.

Zop.—I'll follow thee: we then shall see who best
Can plead his cause: I will defend my gods,
My country, and her laws; thy impious voice
Shall bellow for thy vengeful deity,
Thy persecuting god, and his false prophet.
(Turning to Phanor.)
Haste, Phanor, and with me repulse the traitor;
Who spares a villain is a villain:—come,

Let us, my friend, unite to crush his pride,
Subvert his wily purposes, destroy him,
Or perish in the attempt: If Mecca listens
To Zopir's councils, I shall free my country
From a proud tyrant's power, and save mankind.

ACT II. SCENE I.

Seid, Palmira.

Palmira.—Welcome, my Seid, do I see thee here
Once more in safety? what propitious god
Conducted thee? at length Palmira's woes
Shall have an end, and we may yet be happy.

Seid.—Thou sweetest charmer, balm of every woe,
Dear object of my wishes and my tears,
O since that day of blood when flushed with conquest
The fierce barbarian snatched thee from my arms,
When midst a heap of slaughtered friends I lay
Expiring on the ground, and called on death,
But called in vain, to end my hated being,
What have I suffered for my dear Palmira!
How have I cursed the tardy hours that long
Withheld my vengeance! my distracted soul's
Impatience thirsted for the bloody field,
That with these hands I might lay waste this seat
Of slavery, where Palmira mourned so long
In sad captivity; but thanks to heaven!
Our holy prophet, whose deep purposes
Are far beyond the ken of human wisdom,
Hath hither sent his chosen servant Omar;
I flew to meet him, they required a hostage;
I gave my faith, and they received it; firm
In my resolve to live or die for thee.

Pal.—Seid, the very moment ere thou camest
To calm my fears, and save me from despair,
Was I entreating the proud ravisher;
Thou knowest, I cried, the only good on earth
I prized is left behind, restore it to me:

Then clasped his knees, fell at the tyrant's feet,
And bathed them with my tears, but all in vain:
How his unkind refusal shocked my soul!
My eyes grew dim, and motionless I stood
As one deprived of life; no succor nigh,
No ray of hope was left, when Seid came
To ease my troubled heart, and bring me comfort.

Seid.—Who could behold unmoved Palmira's woes?

Pal.—The cruel Zopir; not insensible
He seemed to my misfortunes, yet at last
Unkindly told me, I must never hope
To leave these walls, for naught should tear me from him.

Seid.—'Tis false; for Mahomet, my royal master,
With the victorious Omar, and forgive me,
If to these noble friends I proudly add
The name of Seid, these shall set thee free,
Dry up thy tears, and make Palmira happy:
The God of Mahomet, our great protector,
That God whose sacred standard I have borne;
He who destroyed Medina's haughty ramparts
Shall lay rebellious Mecca at our feet;
Omar is here, and the glad people look
With eyes of friendship on him; in the name
Of Mahomet he comes, and meditates
Some noble purpose.

Pal.— Mahomet indeed
Might free us, and unite two hearts long since
Devoted to his cause; but he, alas!
Is far removed, and we abandoned captives.

SCENE II.

Palmira, Seid, Omar.

Omar.—Despair not; heaven perhaps may yet reward you,
For Mahomet and liberty are nigh.

Seid.—Is he then come?

Palmira.—Our friend and father?

Omar.— Yes.

I met the council, and by Mahomet
Inspired, addressed them thus: "Within these walls,
Even here," I cried, "the favorite of heaven,
Our holy prophet, first drew breath; the great,
The mighty conqueror, the support of kings;
And will ye not permit him but to rank
As friend and fellow-citizen? he comes not
To ruin or enslave, but to protect,
To teach you and to save, to fix his power,
And hold dominion o'er the conquered heart."
I spoke; the hoary sages smiled applause,
And all inclined to favor us; but Zopir,
Still resolute and still inflexible,
Declared, the people should be called together,
And give their general voice: the people met,
Again I spoke, addressed the citizens,
Exhorted, threatened, practiced every art
To win their favor, and at length prevailed;
The gates are opened to great Mahomet,
Who after fifteen years of cruel exile
Returns to bless once more his native land;
With him the gallant Ali, brave Hercides,
And Ammon the invincible, besides
A numerous train of chosen followers:
The people throng around him; some with looks
Of hatred, some with smiles of cordial love;
Some bless the hero, and some curse the tyrant:
Some threaten and blaspheme, whilst others fall
Beneath his feet, embrace and worship him;
Meantime the names of God, of peace, and freedom,
Are echoed through the all-believing crowd;
Whilst Zopir's dying party bellows forth
In idle threats its impotent revenge:
Amidst their cries, unruffled and serene,
In triumph walks the god-like Mahomet,
Bearing the olive in his hand; already
Peace is proclaimed, and see! the conqueror comes.

SCENE III.

Mahomet, Omar, Hercides, Seid, Palmira, Attendants.

Mahomet.—My friends, and fellow-laborers, valiant Ali,
Morad, and Ammon, and Hercides, hence
To your great work, and in my name instruct
The people, lead them to the paths of truth,
Promise and threaten; let my God alone
Be worshipped, and let those who will not love
Be taught to fear him.—Seid, art thou here?
Seid.—My ever-honored father, and my king,
Led by that power divine who guided thee
To Mecca's walls, preventing your commands
I came, prepared to live or die with thee.
Ma.—You should have waited for my orders; he
Who goes beyond his duty knows it not;
I am heaven's minister, and thou art mine;
Learn then of me to serve and to obey.
Palmira.—Forgive, my lord, a youth's impatient ardor:
Brought up together from our infant years,
The same our fortunes, and our thoughts the same:
Alas! my life has been a life of sorrow;
Long have I languished in captivity,
Far from my friends, from Seid, and from thee;
And now at last, when I beheld a ray
Of comfort shining on me, thy unkindness
Blasts my fair hopes, and darkens all the scene.
Ma.—Palmira, 'tis enough: I know thy virtues;
Let naught disturb thee: spite of all my cares,
Glory, and empire, and the weight of war,
I will remember thee; Palmira still
Lives in my heart, and shares it with mankind:
Seid shall join our troops; thou, gentle maid,
Mayest serve thy God in peace: fear naught but Zopir.

SCENE IV.

Mahomet, Omar.

Mahomet.—Brave Omar, stay, for in thy faithful bosom

Will I repose the secrets of my soul:
The lingering progress of a doubtful siege
May stop our rapid course; we must not give
These weak deluded mortals too much time
To pry into our actions; prejudice
Rules o'er the vulgar with despotic sway.
Thou knowest there is a tale which I have spread
And they believe, that universal empire
Awaits the prophet, who to Mecca's walls
Shall lead his conquering bands, and bring her peace.
'Tis mine to mark the errors of mankind,
And to avail me of them; but whilst thus
I try each art to soothe this fickle people,
What thinks my friend of Seid and Palmira?

Omar.—I think most nobly of them, that amidst
Those few staunch followers who own no God,
No faith but thine, who love thee as their father,
Their friend, and benefactor, none obey
Or serve thee with an humbler, better mind;
They are most faithful.

Ma.— Omar, thou art deceived;
They are my worst of foes, they love each other.

Omar.—And can you blame their tenderness?

Ma.— My friend,
I'll tell thee all my weakness.

Omar.— How, my lord!

Ma.—Thou knowest the reigning passion of my soul;
Whilst proud ambition and the cares of empire
Weighed heavy on me, Mahomet's hard life
Has been a conflict with opposing Nature,
Whom I have vanquished by austerity,
And self-denial; have banished from me
That baleful poison which unnerves mankind,
Which only serves to fire them into madness,
And brutal follies; on the burning sand
Or desert rocks I brave the inclement sky,
And bear the seasons' rough vicissitude:
Love is my only solace, the dear object
Of all my toils, the idol I adore,

The god of Mahomet, the powerful rival
Of my ambition: know, midst all my queens,
Palmira reigns sole mistress of my heart:
Think then what pangs of jealousy thy friend
Must feel when she expressed her fatal passion
For Seid.

Omar.—But thou art revenged.

Ma.— Judge thou
If soon I ought not to take vengeance on them;
That thou mayest hate my rival more, I'll tell thee
Who Seid and Palmira are—the children
Of him whom I abhor, my deadliest foe.

Omar.—Ha! Zopir!

Ma.— Is their father: fifteen years
Are past since brave Hercides to my care
Gave up their infant years; they know not yet
Or who or what they are; I brought them up
Together; I indulged their lawless passion,
And added fuel to the guilty flame.
Methinks it is as if the hand of heaven
Had meant in them to centre every crime.
But I must—Ha! their father comes this way,
His eyes are full of bitterness and wrath
Against me—now be vigilant, my Omar,
Hercides must be careful to possess
This most important pass; return, and tell me
Whether 'tis most expedient to declare
Against him, or retreat: away.

SCENE V.

Zopir, Mahomet.

Zopir.— Hard fate!
Unhappy Zopir! thus compelled to meet
My worst of foes, the foe of all mankind!

Mahomet.—Since 'tis the will of heaven that Mahomet
And Zopir should at length unite, approach
Without a blush, and fearless tell thy tale.

Zop.—I blush for thee alone, whose baneful arts
Have drawn thy country to the brink of ruin;
Who in the bosom of fair peace wouldst wage
Intestine war, loosen the sacred bonds
Of friendship, and destroy our happiness;
Beneath the veil of proffered terms thou meanest
But to betray, whilst discord stalks before thee:
Thou vile assemblage of hypocrisy
And insolence, abhorred tyrant! thus
Do the chosen ministers of heaven dispense
Its sacred blessings, and announce their God?

Ma.—Wert thou not Zopir, I would answer thee
As thou deservest, in thunder, by the voice
Of that offended Being thou deridest:
Armed with the hallowed Koran I would teach thee
To tremble and obey in humble silence:
And with the subject world to kneel before me;
But I will talk to thee without disguise,
As man to man should speak, and friend to friend:
I have ambition, Zopir; where's the man
Who has it not? but never citizen,
Or chief, or priest, or king projected aught
So noble as the plan of Mahomet;
In acts or arms hath every nation shone
Superior in its turn; Arabia now
Steps forth; that generous people, long unknown
And unrespected, saw her glories sunk,
Her honors lost; but, lo! the hour is come
When she shall rise to victory and renown;
The world lies desolate from pole to pole;
India's slaves, and bleeding Persia mourns
Her slaughtered sons; whilst Egypt hangs the head
Dejected; from the walls of Constantine
Splendor is fled; the Roman Empire torn
By discord, sees its scattered members spread
On every side inglorious;—let us raise
Arabia on the ruins of mankind:
The blind and tottering universe demands
Another worship, and another God.
Crete had her Minos, Egypt her Osiris,

To Asia Zoroaster gave his laws,
And Numa was in Italy adored:
O'er savage nations where nor monarchs ruled
Nor manners softened, nor religion taught,
Hath many a sage his fruitless maxims spread;
Beneath a nobler yoke I mean to bend
The prostrate world, and change their feeble laws,
Abolish their false worship, pull down
Their powerless gods, and on my purer faith
Found universal empire; say not, Zopir,
That Mahomet betrays his country, no:
I mean but to destroy its weak supports,
And, banishing idolatry, unite it
Beneath one king, one prophet, and one God;
I shall subdue it but to make it glorious.

Zop.—Is this thy purpose then, and darest thou thus
Avow it? canst thou change the hearts of men,
And make them think like thee? are war and slaughter
The harbingers of wisdom and of peace;
Can he who ravages instruct mankind?
If in the night of ignorance and error
We long have wandered, must thy dreadful torch
Enlighten us? What right hast thou to empire?

Ma.—That right which firm, exalted spirits claim
O'er vulgar minds.

Zop.— Thus every bold impostor
May forge new fetters, and enslave mankind:
He has a right, it seems, to cheat the world
If he can do it with an air of grandeur.

Ma.—I know your people well; I know they want
A leader; my religion, true or false,
Is needful to them: what have all your gods
And all your idols done? what laurels grow
Beneath their altars? your low, grovelling sect
Debases man, unnerves his active soul,
And makes it heavy, phlegmatic, and mean;
Whilst mine exalts it, gives it strength and courage:
My law forms heroes.

Zop.— Rather call them robbers:

Away; nor bring thy hateful lessons here;
Go to the school of tyrants, boast thy frauds
To lost Medina, where thou reignest supreme,
Where blinded bigots bend beneath thy power,
And thou beholdest thy equals at thy feet.

Ma.—My equals! Mahomet has none; long since
I passed them all; Medina is my own,
And Mecca trembles at me; if thou holdest
Thy safety dear, receive the peace I offer.

Zop.—Thou talkest of peace, but 'tis not in thy heart;
I'm not to be deceived.

Ma.— I would not have thee;
The weak deceive, the powerful command:
To-morrow I shall force thee to submit;
To-day, observe, I would have been thy friend.

Zop.—Can we be friends? can Mahomet and Zopir
E'er be united? say, what god shall work
A miracle like that?

Ma.— I'll tell thee one,
A powerful God, one that is always heard,
By me he speaks to thee.

Zop.— Who is it? name him.

Ma.—Interest, thy own dear interest.

Zop.— Sooner heaven
And hell shall be united; interest
May be the god of Mahomet, but mine
Is—justice: what shall join them to each other?
Where is the cement that must bind our friendship?
Is it that son I slew, or the warm blood
Of Zopir's house which thou hast shed?

Ma.— It is
Thy blood, thy son's——for now I will unveil
A secret to thee, known to none but me:
Thou weepest thy children dead; they both are—living.

Zop.—What sayest thou? living? unexpected bliss!
My children living?

Ma.— Yes; and both—my prisoners.

Zop.—My children slaves to thee? impossible!

Ma.—My bounty nourished them.

Zop.— And couldst thou spare
A child of Zopir's?

Ma.— For their father's faults
I would not punish them.

Zop.— But tell me, say,
For what are they reserved?

Ma.— Their life or death
Depend on me: speak but the word, and thou
Art master of their fate.

Zop.— O name the price
And thou shalt have it; must I give my blood,
Or must I bear their chains, and be the slave
Of Mahomet?

Ma.— I ask not either of thee:
Lend me thy aid but to subdue the world;
Surrender Mecca to me, and give up
Your temple, bid the astonished people read
My sacred Koran; be thou my vassal,
And fall before me, then will I restore
Thy son, perhaps hereafter may reward thee
With honors, and contract a closer tie
With Zopir.

Zop.— Mahomet, thou seest in me
A tender father: after fifteen years
Of cruel absence, to behold my children,
To die in their embraces, were the first
And fairest blessings that my soul could wish for;
But if to thee I must betray my country,
Or sacrifice my children, know, proud tyrant,
The choice is made already—fare thee well.

Ma.—Inexorable dotard! but henceforth
I will be more implacable, more cruel
Even than thyself.

SCENE VI.

Mahomet, Omar.

Omar.— And so indeed thou must be,

Or all is lost: already I have bought
Their secret counsels: Mahomet, to-morrow
The truce expires, and Zopir reassumes
His power; thy life's in danger: half the senate
Are leagued against thee: those who dare not fight
May hire the dark assassin to destroy thee;
May screen their guilt beneath the mask of justice,
And call the murder legal punishment.

Mahomet.—First they shall feel my vengeance: persecution,
Thou knowest, has ever been my best support.
Zopir must die.

Omar.— 'Tis well resolved: his fate
Will teach the rest obedience: lose no time.

Ma.—Yet, spite of my resentment, I must hide
The murderous hand that deals the blow, to 'scape
Suspicion's watchful eye, and not incense
The multitude.

Omar.— They are not worth our care.

Ma.—And yet they must be pleased: I want an arm
That will strike boldly.

Omar.— Seid is the man;
I'll answer for him.

Ma.— Seid?

Omar.— Ay: the best,
The fittest instrument to serve our purpose:
As Zopir's hostage he may find occasion
To speak with him, and soon avenge his master.
Thy other favorites are too wise, too prudent
For such a dangerous enterprise; old age
Takes off the bandage of credulity
From mortal eyes; but the young, simple heart,
The willing slave to its own fond opinions,
And void of guile, will act as we direct it:
Youth is the proper period for delusion.
Seid, thou knowest, is superstitious, bold,
And violent, but easy to be led;
Like a tame lion, to his keeper's voice
Obedient.

Ma.—What! the brother of Palmira?

Omar.—Ay; Seid, the fierce son of thy proud foe,
The incestuous rival of great Mahomet,
His master's rival.

Ma.— I detest him, Omar,
Abhor his very name; my murdered son
Cries out for vengeance on him; but thou knowest
The object of my love, and whence she sprung;
Thou seest I am oppressed on every side;
I would have altars, victims, and a throne;
I would have Zopir's blood, and Seid's too:
I must consult my interest, my revenge,
My honor, and my love, that fatal passion,
Which, spite of my resentment, holds this heart
In shameful chains: I must consult religion,
All powerful motive, and necessity
That throws a veil o'er every crime: away.

ACT III. SCENE I.

Seid, Palmira.

Palmira.—O Seid, keep me not in dread suspense,
What is this secret sacrifice? what blood
Hath heaven demanded?

Seid.— The eternal power
Deigns to accept my service, calls on me
To execute its purposes divine;
To him this heart's devoted, and for him
This arm shall rise in vengeance; I am bound
To Omar and to Mahomet, have sworn
To perish in the glorious cause of heaven:
My next and dearest care shall be Palmira.

Pal.—Why was not I a witness to thy oath?
Had I been with thee, I had been less wretched;
But doubts distract me: Omar talks of treason,
Of blood that soon must flow; the senate's rage,
And Zopir's dark intrigues: the flames of war
Once more are kindled, and the sword is drawn

Heaven only knows when to be sheathed again:
So says our prophet, he who cannot lie,
Cannot deceive us: O I fear for Seid,
Fear all from Zopir.

Seid.— Can he have a heart
So base and so perfidious? but this morning,
When as a hostage I appeared before him,
I thought him noble, generous and humane;
Some power invincible in secret worked,
And won me to him; whether the respect
Due to his name, or specious form external
Concealed the blackness of his heart I know not;
Whether thy presence filled my raptured soul
With joy that drove out every painful sense,
And would not let me think of aught but thee:
Whate'er the cause, methought I was most happy
When nearest him: that he should thus seduce
My easy heart makes me detest him more;
And yet how hard it is to look on those
With eyes of hatred whom we wish to love!

Pal.—By every bond hath heaven united us,
And Seid and Palmira are the same:
Were I not bound to thee, and to that faith
Which Mahomet inspires, I too had pleaded
The cause of Zopir; but religion, love,
And nature, all forbid it.

Seid.— Think no more
Of vain remorse, but listen to the voice
Of heaven, the God we serve will be propitious:
Our holy prophet who protects his children
Will bless our faithful love: for thy dear sake
I hazard all. Farewell.

SCENE II.

Palmira.

Palmira.—(Alone.) Some dark presage
Of future misery hangs o'er me still:
That love which made my happiness, this day,

So often wished for, is a day of horror:
What is this dreadful oath, this solemn compact
Which Seid talks of? I've a thousand fears
Upon me when I think of Zopir: oft
As I invoke great Mahomet, I feel
A secret dread, and tremble as I worship:
O save me, heaven! fearful I obey,
And blind I follow: O direct my steps
Aright, and deign to wash my tears away!

SCENE III.

Mahomet, Palmira.

Palmira.—Propitious heaven hath heard my prayers; he comes,
The prophet comes. O gracious Mahomet,
My Seid——

Mahomet.— What of him? thou seemest disturbed;
What should Palmira fear when I am with her!

Pal.—Have I not cause when Mahomet himself
Seems touched with grief?

Ma.— Perhaps it is for thee:
Darest thou, imprudent maid, avow a passion
Ere I approved it: is the heart I formed
Turned rebel to its master, to my laws
Unfaithful? O ingratitude!

Pal.— My lord,
Behold me at your feet, and pity me:
Didst thou not once propitious smile upon us,
And give thy sanction to our growing love?
Thou knowest the virtuous passion that unites us
Is but a chain that binds us more to thee.

Ma.—The bonds that folly and imprudence knit
Are dangerous; guilt doth sometimes follow close
The steps of innocence: our hearts deceive us,
And love with all his store of dear delights,
May cost us tears, and dip his shafts in blood.

Pal.—Nor would I murmur if it flowed for Seid.

Ma.—Are you indeed so fond?

Pal.— E'er since the day
When good Hercides to thy sacred power
Consigned us both, unconquerable instinct,
Still growing with our years, united us
In tender friendship; 'twas the work of heaven
That guides our every action, and o'errules
The fate of mortals; so thy doctrines teach:
God cannot change, nor gracious heaven condemn
That love itself inspired: what once was right
Is always so; canst thou then blame Palmira?

Ma.—I can, and must; nay, thou wilt tremble more
When I reveal the horrid secret to thee.
Attend, rash maid, and let me teach thy soul
What to avoid, and what to follow: listen
To me alone.

Pal.— To thee alone Palmira
Will listen ever, the obedient slave
Of Mahomet; this heart can never lose
Its veneration for thy sacred name.

Ma.—That veneration in excess may lead
To foul ingratitude.

Pal.— When I forget
Thy goodness, then may Seid punish me!

Ma.—Seid!

Pal.— O why, my lord, that cruel frown,
And look severe?

Ma.— Be not alarmed; I meant
But to explore the secrets of thy heart,
And try if thou wert worthy to be saved:
Be confident, and rest on my protection;
On your obedience will depend your fate:
If ye expect a blessing at my hands,
Be careful to deserve it, and whate'er
The will of heaven determines touching Seid,
Be thou his guide, and direct him in the paths
Of duty, and religion; let him keep
His promise, and be worthy of Palmira.

Pal.—O he will keep it, doubt him not, my lord,
I'll answer for his heart as for my own;
Seid adores thee, worships Mahomet
More than he loves Palmira; thou art all
To him, his friend, his father, and his king:
I'll fly, and urge him to his duty.

SCENE IV.

Mahomet.

Ma.—(Alone.) Well:
Spite of myself I must, it seems, be made
A confidant; the simple girl betrayed
Her guilty flame, and innocently plunged
The dagger in my heart: unhappy race!
Father and children, all my foes, all doomed
To make me wretched! but ye soon shall prove
That dreadful is my hatred—and my love.

SCENE V.

Mahomet, Omar.

Omar.—At length the hour is come, to seize Palmira,
To conquer Mecca, and to punish Zopir;
His death alone can prop our feeble cause,
And humble these proud citizens: brave Seid
Can best avenge thee; he has free access
To Zopir: yonder gloomy passage leads
To his abode; there the rebellious chief
His idle vows and flattering incense pours
Before his fancied deities; there Seid,
Full of the law divine by thee inspired,
Shall sacrifice the traitor to the God
Of Mahomet.

Mahomet.— He shall: that youth was born
For crimes of deepest dye: he shall be first
My useful slave, my instrument, and then
The victim of my rage; it must be so:

My safety, my resentment, and my love,
My holy faith, and the decrees of fate
Irrevocable, all require it of me:
But thinkest thou, Omar, he hath all the warmth
Of wild fanaticism?

Omar.— I know he has,
And suits our purpose well; Palmira, too,
Will urge him on; religion, love, resentment
Will blind his headstrong youth, and hurry him
To madness.

Ma.— Hast thou bound him by an oath?

Omar.—O yes; in all the gloomy pomp of rites
Nocturnal, oaths, and altars, we have fixed
His superstitious soul, placed in his hand
The sacred sword, and fired him with the rage
Of fierce enthusiasm—but behold him.

SCENE VI.

Mahomet, Omar, Seid.

Mahomet.— Child
Of heaven, decreed to execute the laws
Of an offended God, now hear by me
His sacred will: thou must avenge his cause.

Seid.—O thou, to whom my soul devoted bends
In humblest adoration, king and prophet,
Sovereign, acknowledged by the voice of heaven,
O'er prostrate nations—I am wholly thine:
But O enlighten my dark mind! O say,
How can weak man avenge his God?

Ma.— Oft-times
Doth he make use of feeble hands like thine
To punish impious mortals, and assert
His power divine.

Seid.— Will he, whose perfect image
Is seen in Mahomet, thus condescend
To honor Seid?

Ma.— Do as he ordains;

This is the highest honor man can boast,
Blindly to execute his great decree:
Be thankful for the choice, and strike the blow:
The angel of destruction shall assist,
The God of armies shall protect thee.

Seid.— Speak;
What tyrant must be slain? what blood must flow?

Ma.—The murderer's blood whom Mahomet abhors,
Who persecutes our faith, and spurns our God,
Who slew my son; the worst of all my foes,
The cruel Zopir.

Seid.— Ha! must Zopir fall?

Ma.—And dost thou pause? presumptuous youth! 'tis impious
But to deliberate: far from Mahomet
Be all who for themselves shall dare to judge
Audacious; those who reason are not oft
Prone to believe; thy part is to obey.
Have I not told thee what the will of heaven
Determines? if it be decreed that Mecca,
Spite of her crimes and base idolatry,
Shall be the promised temple, the chosen seat
Of empire, where I am appointed king,
And pontiff, knowest thou why our Mecca boasts
These honors? knowest thou holy Abram here
Was born, that here his sacred ashes rest?
He who, obedient to the voice of God,
Stifled the cries of nature, and gave up
His darling child: the same all-powerful Being
Requires of thee a sacrifice; to thee
He calls for blood; and darest thou hesitate
When God commands? hence, vile idolater,
Unworthy Mussulman, away, and seek
Another master; go, and love Palmira;
But thou despisest her, and bravest the wrath
Of angry heaven; away, forsake thy lord,
And serve his deadliest foes.

Seid.— It is the voice
Of God that speaks in Mahomet:—command,
And I obey.

Ma.— Strike, then, and by the blood
Of Zopir merit life eternal.—Omar,
Attend and watch him well.

SCENE VII.

Seid.

Seid.—(Alone.) To sacrifice
A poor, defenseless, weak old man!—no matter:
How many victims at the altar fall
As helpless! yet their blood in grateful streams
Rises to heaven: God hath appointed me;
Seid hath sworn, and Seid shall perform
His sacred promise:—O assist me now,
Illustrious spirits, you who have destroyed
The tyrants of the earth, O join your rage
To mine, O guide this trembling hand, and thou
Exterminating angel who defendest
The cause of Mahomet, inspire this heart
With all thy fierceness!—ha! what do I see?

SCENE VIII.

Zopir, Seid.

Zopir.—Seid, thou seemest disturbed; unhappy youth!
Why art thou ranked amongst my foes? my heart
Feels for thy woes, and trembles at thy danger;
Horrors on horrors crowd on every side;
My house may be a shelter from the storm.
Accept it, thou art welcome, for thy life
Is dear to Zopir.

Seid.— Gracious heaven! wilt thou
Protect me thus? will Zopir guard his foe?
What do I hear! O duty, conscience, virtue!
O Mahomet, this rives my heart.

Zop.— Perhaps
Thou art surprised to find that I can pity
An enemy, and wish for Seid's welfare;

I am a man like thee; that tie alone
Demands at least a sympathetic tear
For innocence afflicted: gracious gods,
Drive from this earth those base and savage men,
Who shed with joy their fellow-creatures' blood

Seid.—O glorious sentiments! and can there be
Such virtue in an infidel?

Zop.— Thou knowest
But little of that virtue, thus to stand
Astonished at it! O mistaken youth,
In what a maze of errors art thou lost!
Bound by a tyrant's savage laws, thou thinkest
Virtue resides in Mussulmans alone;
Thy master rules thee with a rod of iron,
And shackles thy free soul in shameful bonds;
Zopir thou hatest, alas! thou knowest him not:
I pardon thee because thou art the slave
Of Mahomet; but how canst thou believe
A God who teaches hatred, and delights
In discord?

Seid.— O I never can obey him!
I know, and feel I cannot hate thee, Zopir.

Zop.—Alas! the more I talk to him, the more
He gains upon me; his ingenuous look,
His youth, his candor, all conspire to charm me;
How could a follower of this vile impostor
Thus win my heart! who gave thee birth? what art thou?

Seid.—A wretched orphan; all I have on earth
Is a kind master, whom I never yet
Have disobeyed; howe'er my love for thee
May tempt me to betray him.

Zop.— Knowest thou not
Thy parents, then?

Seid.— His camp was the first object
My eyes beheld; his temple is my country;
I know no other; and amidst the crowd
Of yearly tributes to our holy prophet,

None e'er was treated with more tenderness
Than Seid was.

Zop.— I love his gratitude:
Thy kind return for benefits received
Merits my praise:—O why did heaven employ
The hand of Mahomet in such an office?
He was thy father, and Palmira's too;
Why dost thou sigh? why dost thou tremble thus?
Why turn thee from me? sure some dreadful thought
Hangs on thy mind.

Seid.— It must be so: the times
Are full of terror.

Zop.— If thou feelest remorse
Thy heart is guiltless; murder is abroad,
Let me preserve thy life.

Seid.— O gracious heaven!
And can I have a thought of taking thine?
Palmira! O my oath! O God of vengeance!

Zop.—For the last time remember I entreat thee
To follow me; away, thy fate depends
Upon this moment.

SCENE IX.

Zopir, Seid, Omar.

Omar.—(Entering hastily.) Traitor, Mahomet
Expects thee.

Seid.— O I know not where or what
I am; destruction, ruin and despair
On every side await me: whither now
Shall wretched Seid fly?

Omar.— To him whom God
Hath chosen, thy injured king, and master.

Seid.— Yes:
And there abjure the dreadful oath I made.

SCENE X.

Zopir.

Zopir.—(Alone.) The desperate youth is gone—I know not why,
But my heart beats for his distress; his looks,
His pity, his remorse, his every action
Affect me deeply: I must follow him.

SCENE XI.

Zopir, Phanor.

Phanor.—This letter, sir, was by an Arab given
In secret to me.

Zopir.— From Hercides! gods,
What do I read? will heaven in tenderest pity
At length repay me for a life of sorrows?
Hercides begs to see me—he who snatched
From this fond bosom my two helpless children;
They yet are living, so this paper tells me,
Slaves to the tyrant—Seid and Palmira
Are orphans both, and know not whence they sprang,
Perhaps my children—O delusive hope,
Why wilt thou flatter me? it cannot be;
Fain would I credit thee, thou sweet deceiver:
I fly to meet and to embrace my children;
Yes; I will see Hercides: let him come
At midnight to me, to this holy altar,
Where I so often have invoked the gods,
At last, perhaps, propitious to my vows:
O ye immortal powers, restore my children,
Give back to virtue's paths two generous hearts
Corrupted by an impious, vile usurper!
If Seid and Palmira are not mine,
If such is my hard fate, I will adopt
The noble pair, and be their father still.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

Mahomet, Omar.

Omar.—My lord, our secret is discovered; Seid
Has told Hercides; we are on the verge
Of ruin, yet I know he will obey.

Mahomet.—Revealed it, sayest thou?

Omar.— Yes: Hercides loves him
With tenderness.

Ma.— Indeed, What said he to it?

Omar.—He stood aghast, and seemed to pity Zopir.

Ma.—He's weak, and therefore not to be entrusted;
Fools ever will be traitors; but no matter,
Let him take heed; a method may be found
To rid us of such dangerous witnesses:
Say, Omar, have my orders been obeyed?

Omar.—They have, my lord.

Ma.— 'Tis well: remember, Omar,
In one important hour or Mahomet
Or Zopir is no more; if Zopir dies,
The credulous people will adore that God
Who thus declared for me, and saved his prophet:
Be this our first great object; that once done,
Take care of Seid; art thou sure the poison
Will do its office?

Omar.— Fear it not, my lord.

Ma.—O we must work in secret, the dark shades
Of death must hide our purpose—while we shed
Old Zopir's blood, be sure you keep Palmira
In deepest ignorance; she must not know
The secret of her birth: her bliss and mine
Depend upon it; well thou knowest, my triumphs
From error's fruitful source incessant flow:
The ties of blood, and all their boasted power
Are mere delusions: what are nature's bonds?
Nothing but habit, the mere force of custom:
Palmira knows no duty but obedience

To me; I am her lord, her king, her father,
Perhaps may add the name of husband to them:
Her little heart will beat with proud ambition
To captivate her master—but the hour
Approaches that must rid me of my foe,
The hated Zopir: Seid is prepared—
And see, he comes: let us retire.

Omar.— Observe
His wild demeanor; rage and fierce resentment
Possess his soul.

SCENE II.

Mahomet, Omar, retired to one side of the stage; Seid at the farther end.

Seid.— This dreadful duty then
Must be fulfilled.

Mahomet.—(To Omar.) Let us begone, in search
Of other means to make our power secure.
(Exit with Omar.)

Seid.—(Alone.) I could not answer: one reproachful word
From Mahomet sufficed: if heaven requires it of me,
I must obey; but it will cost me dear.

SCENE III.

Seid, Palmira.

Seid.—Palmira, art thou here? what fatal cause
Hath led thee to this seat of horror?

Palmira.— Fear
And love directed me to find thee, Seid,
To ask thee what dread sacrifice thou meanest
To offer here; do heaven and Mahomet
Demand it of thee, must it be? O speak.

Seid.—Palmira, thou commandest my every thought
And every action; all depend on thee:
Direct them as thou wilt, inform my soul,
And guide my hand: be thou my guardian god,

Explain the will of heaven which yet I know not;
Why am I chosen to be its instrument
Of vengeance? are the prophet's dread commands
Irrevocable?

Pal.— Seid, we must yield in silence,
Nor dare to question his decrees; he hears
Our secret sighs, nor are our sorrows hid
From Mahomet's all-seeing eye: to doubt
Is profanation of the deity.
His God is God alone; he could not else
Be thus victorious, thus invincible.

Seid.—He must be Seid's God who is Palmira's:
Yet cannot my astonished soul conceive
A being, tender, merciful, and kind,
Commanding murder; then again I think
To doubt is guilt: the priest without remorse
Destroys the victim: by the voice of heaven
I know that Zopir was condemned, I know
That Seid was predestined to support
The law divine: so Mahomet ordained,
And I obey him; fired with holy zeal
I go to slay the enemy of God;
And yet methinks another deity
Draws back my arm, and bids me spare the victim:
Religion lost her power when I beheld
The wretched Zopir; duty urged in vain
Her cruel plea, exhorting me to murder;
With joy I listened to the plaintive voice
Of soft humanity: but Mahomet—
How awful! how majestic! who can bear
His wrath? his frowns reproached my shameful weakness;
Religion is a dreadful power: alas!
Palmira, I am lost in doubts and fears,
Discordant passions tear this feeble heart:
I must be impious, must desert my faith,
Or be a murderer: Seid was not formed
For an assassin; but 'tis heaven's command,
And I have promised to avenge its cause:
The tears of grief and rage united flow,

Contending duties raise a storm within,
And thou alone, Palmira, must appease it;
Fix my uncertain heart, and give it peace:
Alas! without this dreadful sacrifice,
The tie that binds us is forever broke;
This only can secure thee.

Pal.— Am I then
The price of blood, of Zopir's blood?

Seid.— So heaven
And Mahomet decree.

Pal.— Love ne'er was meant
To make us cruel, barbarous, and inhuman.

Seid.—To Zopir's murderer, and to him alone,
Palmira must be given.

Pal.— O hard condition!

Seid.—But 'tis the will of Mahomet and heaven.

Pal.—Alas!

Seid.— Thou knowest the dreadful curse that waits
On disobedience—everlasting pain.

Pal.—If thou must be the instrument of vengeance,
If at thy hands the blood which thou hast promised
Shall be required——

Seid.— What's to be done?

Pal.— I tremble
To think of it—yet——

Seid.— It must be so then: thou
Hast fixed his doom; Palmira has consented.

Pal.—Did I consent?

Seid.— Thou didst.

Pal.— Detested thought!
What have I said?

Seid.— By thee the voice of heaven
Speaks its last dread command, and I obey:
Yon fatal altar is the chosen seat
Of Zopir's worship, there he bends the knee
To his false gods; retire, my sweet Palmira.

Pal.—I cannot leave thee.

Seid.— Thou must not be witness
To such a deed of horror: these, Palmira,
Are dreadful moments: fly to yonder grove,
Thou wilt be near the prophet there: away.

Pal.—Zopir must die then?

Seid.— Yes: this fatal hand
Must drag him to the earth, there murder him,
And bathe yon ruined altar in his blood.

Pal.—Die by thy hand! I shudder at the thought:
But see! he comes; just heaven!
(The farther part of the stage opens, and discovers an altar.)

SCENE IV.

Seid, Palmira, on one side; Zopir, standing near the altar.

Zopir.— Ye guardian gods
Of Mecca, threatened by an impious sect
Of vile impostors, now assert your power,
And let your Zopir's prayers, perhaps the last
He e'er shall make, be heard! the feeble bonds
Of our short peace are broken, and fierce war
Vindictive rages; O if ye support
The cause of this usurper——

Seid.—(Aside to Palmira.) Hear, Palmira,
How he blasphemes!

Zopir.— May death be Zopir's lot!
I wish for naught on earth but to behold,
In my last hour, and to embrace my children,
To die in their loved arms, if yet they live,
If they are here, for something whispers me
That I shall see them still.

Pal.—(Aside to Seid.) His children, said he?

Zop.—O I should die with pleasure at the sight:
Watch over and protect them, ye kind gods,
O let them think like me, but not like me
Be wretched!

Seid.— See! he prays to his false gods:
This is the time to end him. (Draws his sword.)

Pal.— Do not, Seid.

Seid.—To serve my God, to please and merit thee,
This sword, devoted to the cause of heaven,
Is drawn, and shall destroy its deadliest foe:
Yon dreary walk invites me to the deed,
Methinks the path is bloody, wandering ghosts
Glide through the shade, and beckon me away.

Pal.—What sayest thou, Seid?

Seid.— Ministers of death,
I follow you; conduct me to the altar,
And guide my trembling hand!

Pal.— It must not be;
'Tis horrible: O stop, my Seid.

Seid.— No:
The hour is come, and see! the altar shakes.

Pal.—'Tis heaven's assent, and we must doubt no more.

Seid.—Means it to urge me on, or to restrain?
Our prophet will reproach me for this weakness:
Palmira!

Pal.— Well!

Seid.— Address thyself to heaven;
I go to do the deed.
(He goes behind the altar where Zopir is retired.)

Pal.—(Alone.) O dreadful moment!
What do I feel within! my blood runs cold:
And yet if heaven demands the sacrifice,
Am I to judge, to ask, or to complain?
Where is the heart that knows itself, that knows
Its innocence or guilt? We must obey:
But hark! methought I heard the plaintive voice
Of death; the deed is done—alas! my Seid.

Seid.—(Returns looking wildly around.) What voice was that? where am I? where's Palmira?
I cannot see Palmira; O she's gone,
She's lost forever.

Pal.— Art thou blind to her
Who only lives for thee?

Seid.— Where are we?

Pal.— Speak,
My Seid, is the dreadful sacrifice
Performèd, and thy sad promise all fulfilled?

Seid.—What sayest thou?

Pal.— Zopir? is he dead?

Seid.— Who? Zopir?

Pal.—Good heaven, preserve his senses!—come, my Seid,
Let us be gone.

Seid.— How will these tottering limbs
Support me!—I recover—is it you,
Palmira?

Pal.— Yes: what hast thou done?

Seid.— Obeyed
The voice of heaven, seized with this desperate hand
His silver hairs, and dragged him to the earth:
'Twas thy command: O God! thou couldst not bid me
Commit a crime! trembling and pale a while
I stood aghast, then drew this sacred sword,
And plunged it in his bosom: what a look
Of tenderness and love the poor old man
Cast on his murderer! a scene so mournful
Ne'er did these eyes behold: my heart retains
And will forever keep the sad idea:
Would I were dead like him!

Pal.— Let us repair
To Mahomet, the prophet will protect us;
Here you're in danger; follow me.

Seid.— I cannot:
Palmira, pity me.

Pal.— What mournful thought
Can thus depress thee?

Seid.— O if thou hadst seen
His tender looks, when from his bleeding side
He drew the fatal weapon forth, and cried:
"Dear Seid, poor unhappy Seid!" Oh,
That voice, those looks, and Zopir at my feet
Weltering in blood, are still before my eyes:
What have we done?

Pal.— I tremble for thy life:
O in the name of all the sacred ties
That bind us, fly, and save thyself.

Seid.— Away,
And leave me: why did thy ill-fated love
Command this dreadful sacrifice, Palmira?
Without thy cruel order heaven itself
Had never been obeyed.

Pal.— Unkind reproach!
Couldst thou but know what thy Palmira suffers
How wouldst thou pity her!

Seid.— What dreadful object
Is that before us?
(Zopir rises up slowly from behind the altar, and leans upon it.)

Pal.— 'Tis the murdered Zopir;
Bloody and pale he drags his mangled limbs
Toward us.

Seid.— Wilt thou go to him?

Pal.— I must;
For pity and remorse distract my soul,
And draw me to him.

Zop.—(Comes forward leaning on Palmira.) Gentle maid, support me! (He sits down.)
Ungrateful Seid, thou hast slain me; now
Thou weepest; alas! too late.

SCENE V.

Zopir, Seid, Palmira, Phanor.

Phanor.— O dreadful sight!
What's here?

Zopir.— I wish I could have seen my friend
Hercides—Phanor, art thou there?—behold
My murderer. (Points to Seid.)

Phan.— O guilt! accursed deed!
Unhappy Seid, look upon—thy father.

Seid.—Who?

Palmira.—He?

Seid.— My father?

Zop.— Gracious heavens!

Phan.— Hercides
In his last moments took me in his arms,
And weeping cried: "If there be time, O haste
Prevent a parricide, and stop the arm
Of Seid;" in my breast the tyrant lodged
The dreadful secret; now I suffer for it,
And die by Mahomet's detested hand:
Haste, Phanor, fly, inform the hapless Zopir,
That Seid and Palmira are—his children.

Seid.—Palmira!

Pal.— Thou my brother?

Zop.— O ye gods!
O nature, thou hast not deceived me then,
When thou didst plead for them! unhappy Seid,
What could have urged thee to so foul a deed?

Seid.—(Kneeling.) My gratitude, my duty, my religion,
All that mankind hold sacred, urged me on
To do the worst of actions:—give me back
That fatal weapon.

Pal.—(Laying hold of Seid's arm.) Plunge it in my breast;
I was the cause of my dear father's murder;
And incest is the price of parricide.

Seid.—Strike both: heaven hath not punishment enough
For crimes like ours.

Zop.—(Embracing them.) Let me embrace my children:
The gods have poured into my cup of sorrow
A draught of sweetest happiness: I die
Contented, and resign me to my fate:
But you must live, my children; you, my Seid,
And you, Palmira, by the sacred name
Of nature, by thy dying father's blood,
Fast flowing from the wound which thou hast made,
Let me entreat you, live; revenge yourselves,
Avenge the injured Zopir, but preserve

Your gracious lives; the great, the important hour
Approaches, that must change the mournful scene:
The offended people, ere to-morrow's dawn,
Will rise in arms and punish the usurper;
My blood will add fresh fuel to their rage;
Let us await the issue.

Seid.— O I fly
To sacrifice the monster, to take vengeance
For a dear father's life, or lose my own.

SCENE VI.

Zopir, Seid, Palmira, Omar, Attendants.

Omar.—Guards, seize the murderer; Mahomet is come
To punish guilt, and execute the laws.

Zopir.—What do I hear?

Seid.— Did Mahomet command thee
To punish Seid?

Palmira.— Execrable tyrant!
Was not the murder done by thy command?

Omar.—'Twas not commanded.

Seid.— Well have I deserved
This just reward of my credulity.

Omar.—Soldiers, obey.

Pal.— O stop, ye shall not——

Omar.— Madame,
If Seid's life is dear to you, submit
With patience, lest the prophet's anger fall
Like thunder on your head; if you obey,
Great Mahomet is able to protect you:
Guards, lead her to the king.

Pal.— O take me, death,
From this sad scene of never-ending woe!
(Seid and Palmira are carried off.)

Zop.—(To Phanor.) They're gone, they're lost: O most unhappy father,

The wound which Seid gave is not so deep,
So painful as this parting.

Phan.— See, my lord,
The day appears, and the armed multitudes
Press onward to defend the cause of Zopir.

Zop.—Support me, Phanor: yet thy friend may live
To punish this vile hypocrite; at least
In death may serve my dear—my cruel—children.

ACT V. SCENE I.

Mahomet, Omar, Guards at a distance.

Omar.—Zopir's approaching death alarms the people,
We have endeavored to appease their clamors,
And disavowed all knowledge of the deed;
To some, we called it the avenging hand
Of heaven that favors thus its prophet's cause:
With others, we lament his fall, and boast
Thy awful justice that will soon avenge it.
The crowd attentive listen to thy praise,
And all the danger of the storm is o'er;
If aught remains of busy faction's rage
It is but as the tossing of the waves
After the tempest, when the vault of heaven
Is placid and serene.

Mahomet.— Be it our care
To keep it so: where are my valiant bands?

Omar.—All ready; Osman in the dead of night
By secret paths conducted them to Mecca.

Mahomet.—'Tis strange that men must either be deceived
Or forced into obedience: Seid knows not
It is a father's blood that he has shed?

Omar.—Who could inform him of it? he alone
Who knew the secret is no more; Hercides
Is gone, and Seid soon shall follow him;
For know, he has already drunk the poison;
His crime was punished ere it was committed:
Even whilst he dragged his father to the altar

Death lurked within his veins; he cannot live:
Palmira, too, is safe; she may be useful:
I've given her hopes of Seid's pardon: that
May win her to our cause; she dare not murmur,
Besides, her heart is flexible and soft,
Formed to obey, to worship Mahomet,
And make him soon the happiest of mankind:
Trembling and pale, behold! they bring her to thee.

Mahomet.—Collect my forces, Omar, and return.

SCENE II.

Mahomet, Palmira, Guards.

Palmira.—O heaven! where am I? gracious God!

Mahomet.— Palmira,
Be not alarmed; already I have fixed
Thy fate and Mecca's: know, the great event
That fills thy soul with horror is a mystery
'Twixt heaven and me that's not to be revealed:
But thou art free, and happy: think no more
Of Seid, nor lament him; leave to me
The fate of men; be thankful for thy own:
Thou knowest that Mahomet hath loved thee long,
That I have ever been a father to thee;
Perhaps a nobler fate, and fairer title
May grace thee still, if thou deservest it; therefore
Blot from thy memory the name of Seid,
And let thy soul aspire to greater blessings
Than it could dare to hope for; let thy heart
Be my last noblest victory, and join
The conquered world to own me for its master.

Pal.—What joys, what blessings, or what happiness
Can I expect from thee, thou vile impostor?
Thou bloody savage! This alone was wanting,
This cruel insult to complete my woes:
Eternal Father, look upon this king,
This holy prophet, this all-powerful god
Whom I adored: thou monster, to betray

Two guiltless hearts into the crying sin
Of parricide; thou infamous seducer
Of my unguarded youth, how darest thou think,
Stained as thou art with my dear father's blood,
To gain Palmira's heart? but know, proud tyrant,
Thou art not yet invincible: the veil
Is off that hid thee, and the hand of vengeance
Upraised to scourge thy guilt: dost thou not hear
The maddening multitude already armed
In the defense of injured innocence?
From death's dark shades my murdered father comes
To lead them on: O that these feeble hands
Could tear thee piece-meal, thee and all thy train!
Would I could see them weltering in their blood;
See Mecca, and Medina, Asia, all
Combined against thee! that the credulous world
Would shake off thy vile chains, and thy religion
Become the jest and scorn of all mankind
To after ages! may that hell, whose threats
Thou hast so often denounced 'gainst all who dared
To doubt thy false divinity, now open
Her fiery gates, and be thy just reward!
These are the thanks I owe thee for thy bounties,
And these the prayers I made for Mahomet.

Ma.—I see I am betrayed; but be it so:
Whoe'er thou art, learn henceforth to obey;
For know, my heart——

SCENE III.

Mahomet, Palmira, Omar, Ali, Attendants.

Omar.— The secret is revealed;
Hercides told it in his dying moments:
The people all enraged have forced the prison:
They're up in arms, and bearing on their shoulders
The bloody corpse of their unhappy chief,
Lament his fate, and cry aloud for vengeance:
All is confusion: Seid at their head
Excites them to rebellion, and cries out,

"I am a parricide;" with rage and grief
He seems distracted; with one voice the crowd
Unite to curse the prophet and his God:
Even those who promised to admit our forces
Within the walls of Mecca, have conspired
With them to raise their desperate arms against thee;
And naught is heard but cries of death and vengeance.

Palmira.—Just heaven pursue him, and defend the cause
Of innocence!

Mahomet.—(To Omar.) Well, what have we to fear?

Omar.—Omar, my lord, with your few faithful friends,
Despising danger, are prepared to brave
The furious storm, and perish at your feet.

Ma.—Alone I will defend you all; come near:
Behold, and say I act like Mahomet.

SCENE IV.

Mahomet, Omar, and his party on one side, Seid, and the people on the other; Palmira in the middle.

Seid.—Avenge my father, seize the traitor.

Mahomet.— People,
Born to obey me, listen to your master.

Seid.—Hear not the monster; follow me:
(He comes forward a little, and then staggers.)
O heaven!
What sudden darkness spreads o'er my dim eyes?
Now strike, my friends—O I am dying.

Ma.— Ha!
Then all is well.

Palmira.— My brother, canst thou shed
No blood but Zopir's?

Seid.— Yes: come on—I cannot;
Some god unnerves me. (He faints.)

Ma.— Hence let every foe
Of Mahomet be taught to fear and tremble:
Know, ye proud infidels, this hand alone

Hath power to crush you all, to me the God
Of nature delegates his sovereign power:
Acknowledge then his prophet, and his laws,
'Twixt Mahomet and Seid let that God
Decide the contest, which of us forever
Is guilty, now, this moment let him perish!

Pal.—My brother—Seid—can this monster boast
Such power? the people stand astonished at him,
And tremble at his voice; and wilt thou yield
To Mahomet?

Seid.—(Supported by his attendants.) Alas! the hand of heaven
Is on me, and the involuntary crime
Is too severely punished: O Palmira,
In vain was Seid virtuous: O if heaven
Chastises thus our errors, what must crimes
Like thine expect, detested Mahomet?
What cause hast thou to tremble—O I die;
Receive me gracious heaven, and spare Palmira. (Dies.)

Pal.—'Tis not, ye people, 'tis not angry heaven
Pursues my Seid. No: he's poisoned——

Ma.—(Interrupting her, and addressing himself to the people.)
Learn
From Seid's fate, ye unbelievers, how
To reverence Mahomet who heaven defends;
Nature and death, ye see, have heard my voice,
And this pale corpse hath witnessed their obedience;
The sword of fate hangs o'er your heads, beware
It fall not on you: thus will I reward
All impious rebels, all vile infidels,
And punish every word and thought against me.
If I withhold my rage, and let you live,
Remember, traitors, that you owe your beings
To my indulgence; hasten to the temple,
Prostrate yourselves before the throne of grace,
And deprecate the wrath of Mahomet.
(The people retire.)

Pal.—O stay, and hear me, people—the barbarian
Poisoned my brother—monster, raised by crimes

To empire thus, and deified by guilt,
Thou murderer of Palmira's hapless race,
Complete thy work, and take my wretched life:
O my dear brother, let me follow thee!
(She seizes her brother's sword and stabs herself.)

Ma.—Seize, and prevent her——

Pal.— 'Tis too late; I die:
And dying hope a God more just than thine
Has yet in store a state of happiness
For injured innocence: let Mahomet
Reign here in peace: this world was made for tyrants.
(Dies.)

Ma.—She's gone; she's lost; the only dear reward
I wished to keep of all my crimes: in vain
I fought, and conquered; Mahomet is wretched
Without Palmira: Conscience, now I feel thee,
And feel that thou canst rive the guilty heart.
O thou eternal God, whom I have made
The instrument of ill, whom I have wronged,
Braved, and blasphemed; O thou whom yet I fear,
Behold me self-condemned, behold me wretched,
Even whilst the world adores me: vain was all
My boasted power: I have deceived mankind;
But how shall I impose on my own heart?
A murdered father, and two guiltless children
Must be avenged: come, ye unhappy victims,
And end me quickly!—Omar, we must strive
To hide this shameful weakness, save my glory,
And let me reign o'er a deluded world:
For Mahomet depends on fraud alone,
And to be worshipped never must be known.

SOCRATES

BY VOLTAIRE

(*Translated by Oliver H. G. Leigh.*)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SOCRATES.

ANITUS, High Priest of Ceres.

MELITUS, one of the Judges of Athens.

XANTIPPE, Wife of Socrates.

AGLAE, a young Athenian lady, brought up by Socrates.

SOPHRONIMUS, a young Athenian gentleman, brought up by Socrates.

DRIXA, TERPANDER, ACROS, friends of Anitus.

Iudges, Disciples of Socrates, and three Pedants, Protected by Anitus.

Socrates.

ARGUMENT.

In Voltaire's drama on the Socratic episode, it was mainly the jealousy of a rejected lover that led to the foulest of judicial murders. Anitus, high-priest of Ceres, is in love with Aglae, a ward of Socrates; but she will have none of him, for her heart is set on Sophronimus, a disciple of the great philosopher, and for the other she has nothing but repulsion and disdain. Urged on by Drixa, his former mistress, Anitus has Socrates brought before the Court of the Areopagus, where his speeches, though containing nothing new, are uttered with such dignity of sentiment and phrase as to redeem a drama which otherwise is of no special merit. If the trial and death scene are slightly burlesqued, it is with the light touch of Voltaire, who seemed incapable of treating any subject altogether in a serious vein.

ACT I. SCENE I.

Anitus, Drixa, Terpander, Acros.

Anitus.—My dear confidante, and you my trusty friends, you well know how much money I have put into your pockets this last feast of Ceres; I am now going to be married, and I

hope you will all do your respective duties on this great occasion.

Drixa.—That, my lord, we most certainly shall, provided you give us an opportunity of getting a little more by it.

Ani.—I shall want of you, Madame Drixa, two fine Persian carpets; from you, Terpander, I must have two large silver candlesticks; and from you, half a dozen robes.

Terpander.—A considerable demand, my lord; but there is nothing which we would not do to merit your holy protection.

Ani.—O you will be rewarded for it a hundredfold: 'tis the best means to gain the favor of the gods: give much, and much you shall receive; but, above all, fail not, I beseech you, to stir up the people against all the rich and great, who are deficient in paying their vows and presenting their offerings.

Acros.—On that, my lord, you may depend; it is a duty too sacred ever to be neglected by us.

Ani.—'Tis well, my friends; may heaven continue to inspire you with the same just and pious sentiments, and be assured you will prosper; you, your children, and your children's children, to all posterity.

Ter.—You have said it, my lord, and therefore it must be so.

SCENE II.

Anitus, Drixa.

Anitus.—Well, my dear Drixa, I believe you will have no objection to my marrying Aglae; I shall not love you the less, and we may still live together as we used to do.

Drixa.—O my lord, I am not jealous; as long as trade goes on well, I am contented. While I had the honor of being one of your mistresses, I was a woman of some consequence in Athens: but if you are in love with Aglae, I, in my turn, am as fond of young Sophronimus: and Xantippe, Socrates' wife, has promised that he shall marry me. I shall be always, notwithstanding, as much at your service as ever. I am only vexed that this young fellow has been brought up with that rascal Socrates, and that Aglae is still in his hands. We must take them both out as fast as we can. Xantippe will be glad

to get rid of them. The beautiful Sophronimus and the fair Aglae have a sad time of it with the surly Socrates.

Ani.—I am in great hopes, my dear, that Melitus and I together shall soon be able to destroy this dangerous fellow, who preaches nothing but virtue and divinity, and has taken the liberty to laugh at some certain adventures that happened at the mysteries of Ceres: but he is Aglae's tutor: her father, Agathon, they tell me, has left her a great fortune: in short, Aglae is a charming girl; I love her, and I will marry her; and as to Socrates, I shall take care of him.

Dri.—Do what you please with Socrates, so I can but get my dear Sophronimus; but how could that fool Agathon leave his daughter in the hands of this old flat-nosed Socrates, that intolerable reasoner, who corrupts all our young men, and keeps them away from courtesans and the mysteries?

Ani.—Agathon himself was tainted with the same vile principles: he was one of your sober, serious fools, whose manners differed in every respect from ours; a man, in short, of another age, one of our sworn and inveterate enemies, who think they have fulfilled every duty when they worship God, assist man, cultivate friendships and study philosophy; one of those ridiculous creatures who insolently deny that the gods prognosticate future events by the liver of an ox; those merciless reasoners, who find fault with priests for sacrificing young girls, or passing a night with them on occasion. These, you see, Drixa, are a kind of people not fit to live. As to Socrates, I should have been glad to have him strangled long ago. However, I have agreed to meet him here in the portico, and talk with him about the marriage.

Dri.—Here he comes: you do him too much honor: but I must leave you, and talk to Xantippe about my young man.

Ani.—The gods conduct you, my dear Drixa; remember to serve them, and don't forget my two fine Persian carpets.

SCENE III.

Anitus, Socrates.

Anitus.—Good morning, my dear Socrates, thou favorite of the gods and wisest of men; methinks every time I see you I

am raised above myself; in you I look up with admiration to the dignity of human nature.

Socrates.—O my lord, I am a plain, simple man, as void of knowledge and as full of weakness as any of my fellow-creatures: it is enough for me if you can bear with me.

Ani.—Bear with? I admire you, and would it were possible I could resemble you! To convince you of it, and that I may oftener be a witness to your virtues and improve by your instructions, I am willing to espouse your fair pupil, Aglae, whom I find you have the entire disposal of.

Soc.—It is true, indeed, that her father, Agathon, who was my friend, the dearest of all relations, bequeathed to my care, by his last will, this amiable and virtuous orphan.

Ani.—With a considerable fortune, no doubt, for I hear she is one of the best matches in all Athens.

Soc.—With regard to that I can give you no information; her father, my dearest friend, whose will is ever sacred to me, forbade me to divulge the situation of her affairs in that point.

Ani.—This respect and discreet veneration for the last will of your friend are worthy of your noble soul; but it is well enough known that Agathon was rich.

Soc.—He deserved to be so, if riches are a mark of the divine favor.

Ani.—They tell me a young coxcomb, named Sophronimus, makes love to her on account of her fortune; but I am persuaded you will not give encouragement to such a fellow, and that Anitus will have no rival.

Soc.—I know in what light I ought to consider a person like you; but it is not for me to thwart the inclinations of Aglae. I would supply the place of a father to her, but I am not her master: she has a right to dispose of her own heart: I look upon restraint in this case as a crime: talk to her: if she hearkens to your proposal, with all my heart, I have no objection.

Ani.—I have your wife's consent already; without doubt she is acquainted with Aglae's sentiments, and therefore I look upon the affair as good as concluded.

Soc.—But I never look upon things as done 'till they are really so.

SCENE IV.

Socrates, Anitus, Aglae.

Socrates.—Come hither, Aglae, and determine for yourself. Here is a person of considerable rank, who offers himself to you for a husband: you are at liberty to explain yourself to him: my presence might perhaps be a restraint upon you: whatever choice you make I shall approve: Xantippe will prepare everything for your nuptials.

Aglae.—Generous Socrates! I am sorry you leave me.

Anitus.—You seem, charming Aglae, to place great confidence in the good Socrates.

Agl.—It is my duty, sir; he has been a father to me; he has educated and instructed me.

Ani.—And pray, my dear, as he has instructed you, tell me what is your opinion of Ceres, Cybele and Venus?

Agl.—Of them, sir, I will think just as you please.

Ani.—'Tis well said, and you will do as I please, too, then, I hope.

Agl.—No, sir; that is quite another affair.

Ani.—You see, the wise Socrates consents to our marriage, and Xantippe above all things wishes for it. You know my passion for you, and are no stranger to my rank and fortune; my happiness, perhaps your own, too, depends on one word, therefore determine.

Agl.—I will answer you, sir, with that truth and sincerity which the great man who just now left us taught me never to depart from: I respect your dignity, know but little of your person, and, in a word, can never be yours.

Ani.—Never? cruel Aglae, are you not free? you will not then?

Agl.—No, sir; I cannot.

Ani.—What an affront, what an indignity is this! but 'tis to Socrates I am obliged for it: he dictated your answer, I know he did; he prefers Sophronimus to me, that unworthy rival, that impious——

Agl.—Sophronimus is not impious, not unworthy; Socrates has loved him from his infancy; he has been a father to us both. Sophronimus is all beauty and all virtue; I love, and am beloved by him; it is in my power to marry him if I think proper; but I shall no more be his than yours.

Ani.—You astonish me: what! own you love Sophronimus?

Agl.—Yes, sir, I own it, because it is true.

Ani.—And yet when it is in your power to make yourself happy with him, refuse him your hand?

Agl.—That, sir, is no less true.

Ani.—Then I suppose your fear of displeasing me prevents your engaging with him?

Agl.—No such thing, I assure you: for, having never wished to please, I have no fear of displeasing you.

Ani.—You dread, then, perhaps, the displeasure of the gods, at seeing you prefer a profane wretch, like Sophronimus, to a high priest?

Agl.—Not in the least. I am persuaded it is matter of very little concern to the supreme being whether I marry you or not.

Ani.—The supreme being! my dear child, you should not talk in this manner; you should say the gods and goddesses: take care, for I see you entertain some very dangerous opinions; but I know too well from whom they came. Learn, then, that Ceres, whose priest I am, may punish you for thus despising her worship and her minister.

Agl.—I despise neither the one nor the other. I have been told that Ceres presides over the harvest, and I believe it; but she has nothing to do with my marriage.

Ani.—She has to do with everything; you know it; but I hope I shall be able to convert you. Are you, indeed, resolved not to marry Sophronimus?

Agl.—Yes; I am resolved, and am very sorry for it.

Ani.—I cannot understand a word of all these contradictions: but observe me; I love you, would have made you happy, and advanced you to rank and dignity: be advised, and reject not the offers which kind fortune thus courts you to accept: remember that everything should be sacrificed to our real interest; that youth will pass away, but riches remain; that

wealth and honors should be your first concern, and that I speak to you on the part of the gods. I beg you will reflect seriously on what I have said: farewell; my dear girl, I shall pray to Ceres that she would inspire you, and still flatter myself she will touch your heart. Once more, adieu; remember, you have promised me never to marry Sophronimus.

Agl.—I promised myself, but not you. (Exit Anitus.) (Alone.) This man but makes me more unhappy. I know not why it is, but I never see him without shuddering: but here comes Sophronimus: alas! whilst his rival fills my heart with terror, he increases my tenderness and doubles my disquietude.

SCENE V.

Aglae, Sophronimus.

Sophronimus.—My dear Aglae, I met Anitus, the priest of Ceres, that worst of men, the sworn enemy of Socrates, just coming from you: your eyes seem bathed in tears.

Aglae.—Is he the enemy of our benefactor, too? Then, indeed, I wonder not at my aversion to him, even before he spoke.

Soph.—And is he the cause of your tears, my Aglae?

Agl.—No, Sophronimus, he can inspire nothing but hatred and disgust: my tears can flow for you alone.

Soph.—For me? O gods, for me, who would repay them with my blood; for me, who adore you, who hope to be beloved by Aglae, who only live for and would die for you? Shall I reproach myself with having embittered one moment of your life? Aglae weeps, and Sophronimus is the cause. What have I done? what crime have I committed?

Agl.—None, my Sophronimus: you could not do it: 'tis not in your nature. I wept because you merit all my tenderness, because you have it, and because I must renounce you.

Soph.—What dreadful sentence have you pronounced against me? I cannot believe you: you love me, you said you did, and Aglae can never change. You have promised to be mine, you cannot wish my death.

Agl.—No; I would have thee live and be happy: but, alas! I cannot make you so: I hoped I could, but fortune has deceived me. I swear to you, Sophronimus, since I cannot be yours, I never will be another's. I have declared so to Anitus, who courts me, and whom I despise; and here I declare the same to you, with a heart full of grief, tenderness and love.

Soph.—Since you love me, I must live; but if you refuse me your hand, it will be death to Sophronimus; therefore, my dearest Aglae, in the name of love, of all your charms, and all your virtues, explain to me this dreadful mystery.

SCENE VI.

Socrates, Sophronimus, Aglae.

Sophronimus.—O my honored master, my father and my friend, behold in Sophronimus the most unfortunate of men, though in the presence of the only two beings upon earth who could make me happy: Socrates first taught me wisdom, and from Aglae I learned to love; you consented to our marriage, and this beauteous fair one, who seemed so desirous of it, now refuses me; and whilst she says she loves, plunges a dagger into my heart: she has broken off the match without assigning any cause for her cruel caprice: O Socrates, prevent my misery, or teach me, if possible, how to bear it.

Socrates.—Aglae is mistress of herself; her father made me her tutor, but not her tyrant; to see you united would have made me happy: if she has changed her mind I am surprised and sorry for it: but let us hear her reasons; if they are good, we must submit to them.

Soph.—It is impossible they should.

Aglae.—To me, however, they appear so, but you shall hear them. When you first opened my father's will, most noble Socrates, you told me he had left me a sufficient competency; from that moment I resolved to bestow my fortune on the good Sophronimus, who has no support but you, no riches but his virtue: you applauded my resolution. How great was my happiness, in promoting that of him whom you have so long regarded as your own son! full of this pleasing hope, I laid

open the situation of my heart to Xantippe, who at once undeceived me. She treated me as an idle visionary; showed me the will of my father, who died a beggar, and left me nothing but your friendship to depend on. Awakened from my dream of promised happiness, nothing remained for me but the melancholy reflection that it was no longer in my power to make the fortune of Sophronimus: I would not oppress him with the weight of my misfortunes.

Soph.—I told you, Socrates, her reasons were poor and insufficient. If she loves me, am I not rich enough? Hitherto, it is true, I have subsisted from your bounty; but there is no employment, however irksome, which I would not undertake, to provide for my dearest Aglae: I ought, indeed, to make her a sacrifice of my passion, to find out some richer, happier lover for her: but I own my weakness, I cannot do it, there I am, indeed, unworthy of her; but if she could content herself with my low estate, if she could stoop to my humble condition: but I dare not hope so much; I sink beneath a misfortune which her fortitude is able to bear.

Soc.—My dear children, it was very indiscreet in Xantippe to show you the will; but believe me, Aglae, she deceived you.

Agl.—Indeed she has not: I saw it with my own eyes: I know my father's hand too well to have the least doubt of it: but be assured, Socrates, I shall be able to bear poverty as I ought: these hands will support me; if I can but live, it is enough for me, but it is not for Sophronimus.

Soph.—It is too much, a thousand times too much for me: thou tender, noble soul, worthy of thy illustrious master: a virtuous and laborious poverty is the natural state of man. I wish I could have offered you a throne, but if you will condescend to live with Sophronimus, our respectable poverty will be superior to the throne of Crœsus.

Soc.—Your generous sentiments at once delight and distress me: I behold with transport those virtues budding forth in your heart, which I myself had sown: never were my hopes better fulfilled than in Aglae and Sophronimus: but once more believe me, Aglae, my wife has misinformed you: you are richer than you think you are: it was not to her, but to me, your

father entrusted you. May he not have left you a fortune which Xantippe knows nothing of?

Agl.—No, Socrates, he says expressly in his will that he has left me poor.

Soc.—And I tell you that you are deceived, that he has left you a sufficient competency to enable you to live happily with the virtuous Sophronimus, and that I desire, therefore, you would come and sign the contract immediately.

SCENE VII.

Socrates, Xantippe, Aglae, Sophronimus.

Xantippe.—Come, come, child, don't stand amusing yourself there with my husband's visions and nonsense: philosophy, to be sure, is a mighty pretty thing when folks have nothing else to do: but you are a beggar, child, and must study how to live first, and philosophize afterward. I have concluded your marriage with Anitus, a worthy priest, and a man of fortune. Come, child, follow me, let me have no delays nor contradiction; I love to be obeyed: quick, quick, my dear, 'tis for your good, therefore let me have none of your reasonings, but follow me.

Sophronimus.—O heaven! my dear Aglae!

Socrates.—Let her talk, and trust to me for your happiness.

Xan.—Let me talk, indeed! I shall talk and do, too, I assure you. You are a pretty one, to be sure, with your wisdom, your familiar demon, your irony and all your nonsense that signifies nothing, to trouble yourself about matrimony: you are a good sort of a man, but you really know nothing of the world; happy is it for you that I am able to govern you. Come, Aglae, I must settle you as soon as possible. And you, sir, there, that seem as if you were thunderstruck, I have taken care of you, too: Drixa is the woman for you: you will both of you thank me by and by: I shall have done it all in a minute: I am very expeditious: let us lose no time, therefore; by rights it should have been all over before this.

Soc.—My children, don't thwart or provoke her, but pay

her all kind of deference: we must comply with since we can't mend her: it is the triumph of reason to live well with those who have none.

ACT II. SCENE I.

Socrates, Sophronimus.

Sophronimus.—Divine Socrates, I know not how to believe my own happiness: how can Aglae, whose father died in extreme poverty, be possessed of so considerable a fortune?

Socrates.—I told you before, she had more than she thought she had: I knew her father's affairs better than herself: let it suffice that you both enjoy a fortune which you deserve: the secrets of the dead should be preserved as religiously as those of the living.

Soph.—I am only afraid the priest of Ceres, to whom you have preferred Sophronimus, will endeavor to avenge Aglae's refusal upon you: he is a man whom we have reason to dread.

Soc.—What has he to fear who does his duty? I know the malice of my enemies; I know all their calumnies; but when we take care never to offend God, and endeavor to do all the good we can to mankind, then is it that we are afraid of nothing, or whilst we live, or when we die.

Soph.—I know it well; yet I should die with grief if the happiness you bestowed on me should induce your enemies to put your virtue to the trial.

SCENE II.

Socrates, Sophronimus, Aglae.

Aglae.—O my benefactor, my father, let me fall at your feet, thou more than man; join me, Sophronimus, in mutual acknowledgments; 'tis he, 'tis Socrates who marries us at his own expense, and gives us best part of his own fortune to support us: but we must not suffer him, we must not be rich on these conditions; no, if our hearts have any gratitude, let them imitate his generosity.

Sophronimus.—O Socrates, with her I throw myself at thy feet; like her I am charmed, astonished and confounded at thy goodness; we will not, must not abuse it; look on us as your children, but do not let those children be a burden to their kind parent; thy friendship is fortune sufficient, 'tis all that we desire; you are not rich, and yet you do more than all the great ones of the earth; but were we to accept thy bounties, we should be unworthy of them.

Socrates.—Rise, my children, you affect me too deeply: are we not bound to respect the will of the dead? did not your father, Aglae, whom I always considered as part of myself, did he not enjoin me to treat you as my daughter? Had I not done so, I had betrayed the confidence of friendship: I took upon me the performance of his will, and I have executed it: the little I bestow on you would have been useless to my old age, which has not many wants to supply. If it was my duty to obey my friend, it is yours to obey your father. I am that father now, and by that sacred name command you not to make me unhappy by your refusal: but retire, I see Xantippe coming this way; I have reasons for desiring you to avoid her at present.

Agl.—Your commands are cruel, but they must be obeyed.

SCENE III.

Socrates, Xantippe.

Xantippe.—A fine piece of work you have made here; upon my word, my dear husband, I must put a stop to your proceedings. Here had I promised Aglae to Anitus, the high priest, a man of interest among the great, and Sophronimus to the rich Drixa, who has extensive influence in the whole nation; and you marry your two fools together and make me break my word to both; not content with this, you must needs give them best part of your fortune, too. Twenty thousand drachms! good gods! twenty thousand drachms! Are you not ashamed of yourself? at the age of threescore and ten, too? Who's to pay your physicians when you are sick? or your lawyers when you have a lawsuit? What am I to do when that

villainous, wry-necked fellow, Anitus, whom you might have had on your side, if he should join his party to persecute you, as they have done so often already? Confusion to all philosophy and philosophers, I say, and to my own foolish regard for you! You pretend to direct others, and want leading-strings yourself; always reasoning without a grain of common sense. If you were not one of the best men in the world, you would be the most ridiculous and the most insupportable: but, mind me, you have only one way left, break off this foolish match, and do what your wife bids you.

Socrates.—You talk well, my dear Xantippe, and with great moderation; but hear what I have to say in return. I did not propose this marriage myself, but Aglae and Sophronimus love and are worthy of each other. I have already made over everything to you that the laws will allow me, and have given almost all that remained to the daughter of my friend: the little which I keep is enough for me. I have no physician to pay because I live sober; no lawyers because I have neither debts nor reversions: and with regard to that philosphy you reproach me with, it will teach me to bear the malice of Anitus and your treatment of me; nay, even to love you, in spite of your ill-humor. (Exit.)

SCENE IV.

Xantippe.—(Alone.) The old fool! and yet, spite of myself, I can't help esteeming him; for, after all, there is something great even in his follies: but his coolness and indifference make me mad. To scold him is but lost labor: for these thirty years past I have been perpetually pecking at him; and when I have tired myself with it, he bids me go on, and I am dumbfounded. Surely there must be something in that soul of his superior to mine.

SCENE V.

Xantippe, Drixa.

Drixa.—So, Madame Xantippe, I see you are mistress at home: fie! fie! how mean it is to be governed by a husband!

this vile Socrates, to prevent my making a young fellow's fortune; but I'll be revenged.

Xantippe.—My dear Madame Drixa, don't be so angry with my husband, I am angry enough with him myself: he's a poor, weak man, I confess; but I verily believe has one of the best hearts in the world; has not the least degree of malice, and does a thousand foolish things without designing, and with so much honesty, that one can't help forgiving him: then, indeed, he is as obstinate as a mule: I have done nothing but tease and torment him my whole life; nay, I have even beat him sometimes, and yet I have never been able to mend him, nay, not so much as to put him into a passion. What can I do with him?

Dri.—I tell you, I'll be revenged; under yonder portico I perceive his good friend Anitus, and some more of our party: let me alone with him.

Xan.—My god! I am dreadfully afraid these folks, all together, will do my poor husband some mischief: I must go and tell him of it, for, after all, one can't help loving him.

SCENE VI.

Anitus, Drixa, Terpander, Acros.

Drixa.—Most noble Anitus, we have all been wronged: you are tricked as well as myself: this vile Socrates has given away three parts of his fortune on purpose to spite you: you must take ample revenge of him.

Anitus.—I design it: heaven itself requires it of me: this man treats me with contempt, and, of course, must despise the gods. Already we have had several accusations against him, we must repeat them, you will all assist me: we will put him in danger of his life, then will I offer him my protection, on condition that he resigns Aglae to me, and to you the beautiful Sophronimus: thus we shall all gain our several points: he will be sufficiently punished by the fright we shall put him into: I shall get my mistress, and you your lover.

Dri.—Wisdom herself speaks in Anitus: sure some divinity inspires you: but tell us, how are we to proceed?

Ani.—This is about the time when the judges go to the tribunal, with Melitus at the head of them.

Dri.—That Melitus is a little pedant, a sad fellow, and your enemy.

Ani.—He is so; but he is still a greater enemy to Socrates; 'tis a rascally hypocrite who supports the rights of the Areopagus against me: but we always hold together when our mutual interest and business is to destroy these pretended wise men, who want to open the eyes of people to our conduct: hearken, my dear Drixa, you are a devotee.

Dri.—Certainly, my lord, I love money, and I love pleasure with all my soul, but in matters of devotion I yield to none.

Ani.—Go, then, immediately, and get together as many bawling enthusiasts as you can, and cry out, impiety! impiety!

Terpander.—Is there anything to be got by it? If there is, we are all ready.

Acros.—Ay, ay, that we are; but what sort of impiety?

Ani.—O every kind: however, we had best accuse him at once of not believing in the gods; that's the shortest way.

Dri.—O let me alone, then.

Ani.—You shall be well supported; go, and stir up your friends under the portico: I'll inform, meantime, some of my news-loving friends of it, who come frequently to dine with me, a parcel of contemptible fellows they are, to be sure, but such as, if properly directed, can do a good deal of mischief on occasion: we must make use of every expedient to promote a good cause: away, my friends, recommend yourselves to Ceres, and be ready to cry out when I give you the signal: 'tis the only way for you to live happy here and gain heaven hereafter.

SCENE VII.

Anitus, Graphius, Chomus, Bertillus.

Anitus.—Most indefatigable Graphius, profound Chomus, and delicate Bertillus, have you finished those little works as I commanded you against the impious Socrates?

Graphius.—My lord, I have labored: he'll never hold up his head again.

Chomus.—I have proved the fact against him; struck him dumb.

Bertillus.—I have only mentioned him in my journal, and it has done for him.

Ani.—Graphius, beware, you know I forbade your prolixity: you are naturally tedious, and that may wear out the patience of the court.

Gra.—My lord, 'tis all in one leaf: wherein I have proved that the soul is an infused quintessence; that tails were given to animals to drive away flies; that Ceres works miracles; and, consequently, that Socrates is an enemy to the state and ought to be exterminated.

Ani.—A most excellent conclusion! remember to carry your accusation to the second judge, who is a complete philosopher. I'll answer for it, you'll soon get rid of your enemy Socrates.

Gra.—My lord, I am not his enemy: I am only vexed that he has so great a reputation: all that I do is for the glory of Ceres and the good of my country.

Ani.—Well, well, make haste and be gone: and you, learned Chomus, what have you done?

Cho.—My lord, finding nothing reprehensible in the writings of Socrates, I shall accuse him point-blank of thinking directly opposite to what he says, and shall show the poison he intends to spread in everything he is to say hereafter.

Ani.—Wonderful, indeed! carry your piece to the fourth judge: he has not common sense, and, therefore, will understand you perfectly: now for you, Bertillus.

Ber.—My lord, here is my last journal upon the Chaos. I have proved, by a regular series from the Chaos to the Olympics, that Socrates perverts the youth of Athens.

Ani.—Admirable! go you from me to the seventh judge, and tell him I desire he'd take care of Socrates; so; here comes Melitus already, the first of the eleven; there's no necessity of practicing any art with him, we know each other too well.

SCENE VIII.

Anitus, Melitus.

Anitus.—Mr. Judge, one word with you: this Socrates must be destroyed.

Melitus.—Indeed, Mr. High Priest, I have long thought so: let us agree in this point; we may quarrel, you know, notwithstanding, about everything else.

Ani.—I know we hate each other most cordially: but at the same time we may lay our heads together to govern the commonwealth.

Mel.—With all my heart, nobody can overhear us: therefore, to speak freely, I know you are a rogue, and you don't look upon me as a very honest man: I can't hurt you, because you are high priest, nor you me, because I am first judge; but Socrates may do us both a mischief, by exposing us to the world; our first business, therefore, is to destroy him, and then we may be at leisure to fall upon each other the first opportunity.

Ani.—(Aside.) 'Tis well observed: how I could rejoice now to see this rascally judge upon an altar, his arms hanging on one side and his legs on the other, whilst I with my golden knife was ripping up his guts and consulting his liver at leisure.

Mel.—(Aside.) Shall I never be able to send this villainous high priest to jail, and make him swallow a pint of hemlock by my command?

Ani.—O my friend, here come our noble assistants. I have taken care to prepare the populace.

Mel.—Very well, my dear friend, you may depend upon me in this affair, not forgetting old scores.

SCENE IX.

Anitus, Melitus, some of the Judges of Athens passing along under the portico. (Anitus whispers Melitus.)

Drixa, Terpander and Acros, together.—Justice, justice, scandal, impiety, justice, justice, irreligion, impiety, justice!

Anitus.—What's the matter, my friends, what's your complaint?

Dri., Ter. and Acr.—Justice! in the name of the people.

Melitus.—Against whom?

Dri., Ter. and Acr.—Against Socrates.

Mel.—Ha! ha! against Socrates? that fellow has been often accused: what has he done now?

Acr.—I don't know what.

Ter.—They say he gives money to young girls in marriage.

Acr.—Ay, he corrupts our youth.

Dri.—O he's a wicked wretch: he has offered up no cakes to Ceres; he says there is a great deal of useless gold and silver in the temple.

Acr.—Ay, and he says the priests of Ceres get drunk sometimes; that's true; he's a wicked wretch, indeed.

Dri.—He's a heretic; he denies the plurality of gods; he's a deist: he believes only in one God; he's an atheist.

All three together.—Yes, he's a heretic, a deist and an atheist.

Mel.—Dreadful accusations, indeed, and all extremely probable: I have heard as much before.

Ani.—The state is in danger if we leave such crimes unpunished: Minerva will withdraw her protection from us.

Dri.—Ay, that she will; I have heard him laugh at Minerva's owl.

Mel.—At Minerva's owl! O heaven! gentlemen, is not it your opinion he ought to be sent to prison immediately?

The Judges.—(All together.) To prison with him, to prison.

Mel.—Guards, carry Socrates to prison this instant.

Dri.—And afterward let him be burned without a hearing.

One of the Judges.—No, no; we must hear him; we must not go against the law.

Ani.—No, no; that's what the good woman meant: we must hear him, but not let what he says have too much effect on us; you know these philosophers are devilish subtle: 'tis they

who have disturbed all those nations which we have endeavored to render peaceable and quiet.

Mel.—To prison with him, to prison.

SCENE X.

Xantippe, Sophronimus, Aglae, Socrates, in chains. (Entering.)

Xantippe.—O mercy, mercy, my poor husband is going to prison; aren't you ashamed, Mr. Judges, to treat a man of his years in this manner? What harm could he do? Alas! it is not in his power, he is more fool than knave, God knows; have pity on him, good gentlemen. O my dear, I told you you would draw yourself into some bad affair. This comes of portioning young girls. What an unhappy creature I am!

Sophronimus.—O my lords, respect his age, respect his virtue; give me his chains! I am ready to yield up my liberty, my life, for his.

Aglae.—Yes; we will go to prison in his stead; we will die for him: do not destroy the noblest, best of men: take us, rather, for your victims.

Melitus.—You see how he corrupts our youth.

Socrates.—No more, my wife, no more, my children; do not oppose the will of heaven, which speaks by the laws: he who resists the law is no longer a citizen. God wills that I should be put in bondage; I submit to his divine decree without murmur or repining. In my own house, in Athens, or in a prison, I am equally free; and whilst I behold in you so much gratitude, and so much friendship, I am happy. What matters it whether Socrates sleeps in his own chamber or in a prison? Everything is as the supreme will ordains, and my will should submit to it.

Mel.—Take away this reasoner.

Anitus.—Gentlemen, what he says I must own has affected me; the man seems to have a good disposition; I flatter myself I should be able to convert him; let me have a little private conversation with him; please to order his wife and these young folks to retire.

One of the Judges.—Most venerable Anitus, you have our consent to parley with him before he appears at the tribunal.

SCENE XI.

Anitus, Socrates.

Anitus.—Most virtuous Socrates, my heart bleeds to see you in this condition.

Socrates.—And have you a heart?

Ani.—I have, and one that feels for you: I am ready to do everything for you.

Soc.—I think you have done enough already.

Ani.—Hark ye, Socrates, your situation is worse than you think it is; let me tell you, your life is in danger.

Soc.—That is of very little consequence.

Ani.—To your noble soul it may appear so, but it is otherwise in the eyes of all those who, like me, admire your virtue: believe me, however you may be armed by philosophy, it is dreadful to die a death of ignominy: but that is not all; your reputation, which should be dear to you, will be sullied in after ages: the religious of both sexes will laugh at your fall, and insult you: if you are burned, they'll light the pile; if you're strangled, they'll tie the cord; if you're poisoned, they'll pound the hemlock; and not only that, but they'll make your memory execrable to all posterity. Now it is in your own power to prevent all this: I will promise not only to save your life, but even to persuade your judges to say with the oracle that you are the wisest of men: you have nothing to do but to give me up your young pupil, Aglae, with the portion; you understand me: as to her marriage with Sophronimus, we shall find means to set it aside: thus you will enjoy a peaceful and honorable old age, and the gods and goddesses will bless you.

Soc.—Soldiers, conduct me to prison immediately. (He is carried off.)

Ani.—This fellow is incorrigible; but it's not my fault; I have done my duty, and have nothing to reproach myself with: he must be abandoned as a reprobate, and left to die in his sins.

ACT III. SCENE I.

The Judges seated on the Tribunal, Socrates below.

Judge.—(To Anitus.) You should not sit here, you are priest of Ceres.

Anitus.—I am only here for edification.

Melitus.—Silence there: Socrates, you are accused of being a bad citizen, of corrupting youth, of denying a plurality of gods, of being a heretic, deist and atheist: answer to the charge.

Socrates.—Judges of Athens, I exhort you all to be as good citizens as I have always myself endeavored to be: to shed your blood for your country, as I have done in many a battle: with regard to youth, guide them by your counsels, and, above all, direct them by your example; teach them to love true virtue, and to avoid the miserable philosophy of the schools: the article concerning a plurality of gods is a little more difficult to discuss, but hear what I have to say upon it. Know, then, ye judges of Athens, there is but one God.

Melitus and another Judge.—O the impious wretch!

Soc.—I say, there is but one God, in his nature infinite, nor can any being partake of his infinity. Turn your eyes toward the celestial globes, to the earth and seas; all correspond together, all are made one for the other: each being is intimately connected with other beings, all formed with one design, by one great architect, one sole master and preserver: perhaps he hath deigned to create genii and demons more powerful and more wise than men; if such exist, they are creatures like you, his first subjects, not gods: but nothing in nature proves to us that they do exist, whilst all nature speaks one God and one father: this God hath no need of Mercury and Iris to deliver his commands to us: he hath only to will, and that is enough. If by Minerva you understand no more than the wisdom of God; if by Neptune you only mean his immutable laws, which raise or depress the sea, you may still reverence Neptune and Minerva, provided that under these emblems you adore none but the supreme being, and that the people are not deceived by you into false opinions. Be careful,

above all, not to turn religion into metaphysics, its essence is morality: dispute not, but worship. If our ancestors believed that the supreme God came down into the arms of Alcmene, Danae and Semele, and had children by them, our ancestors imagined dangerous and idle fables. 'Tis an insult on the divinity to conceive that he could possibly, in any manner whatsoever, commit with woman the crime which we call adultery. It is a discouragement to the rest of mankind to say that, to be a great man it is necessary to be produced from the mysterious union of Jupiter and one of our own wives and daughters. Miltiades, Cimon, Themistocles and Aristides, whom you persecuted, were perhaps much greater than Perseus, Hercules or Bacchus. The only way to become the children of God is to endeavor to please him. Deserve, therefore, that title by never passing an unjust sentence.

Mel.—What insolence! what blasphemy!

Another Judge.—What absurdities! one can't tell what he means.

Mel.—Socrates, you are always too fond of argument: answer briefly, and with precision: did you, or did you not, laugh at Minerva's owl?

Soc.—Judges of Athens, take care of your owls; when you propose ridiculous things as objects of belief, too many are apt to resolve that they will believe nothing: they have sense enough to find out that your doctrine is absurd, though they have not elevation of mind sufficient to discover the law of truth; they know how to laugh at your little deceits, but not to adore the first of beings, the one incomprehensible, incommunicable being, the eternal, all-just and all-powerful God.

Mel.—O the blasphemer! the monster! he has said too much already: I condemn him to death.

Many of the Judges.—And so do we.

One of the Judges.—Several of us are of another opinion; Socrates has spoken wisely; we believe men would be more wise and just if they thought like him: for my part, far from condemning him, I think he ought to be rewarded.

Many of the Judges.—We think so, too.

Mel.—The opinions seem to be divided.

Ani.—Gentlemen of the Areopagus, permit me to interrogate him a little. Do you believe, Socrates, that the sun turns round, and that the Areopagus acts by divine right?

Soc.—You have no authority to ask any questions, but I have authority to teach you what you are ignorant of: it is of little importance to society whether the sun or the earth turns round, but it is of the utmost consequence whether the men who turn with them be just or unjust: virtue only acts from the right divine, and you and the Areopagus have no rights but those which your country has bestowed on you.

Ani.—Illustrious and most equitable judges, let Socrates retire. (Helitus makes a sign, Socrates is carried out.)

Ani.—(Proceeds.) Most august Areopagus, instituted by heaven, you hear what he says: this dangerous fellow denies that the sun turns round, and that you act by right divine: if these opinions prevail, adieu to magistracy, and adieu to the sun: you are no longer judges appointed by Minerva; you will become accountable for your proceedings; you must no longer determine but according to the laws; and if you once depend on the laws you are undone: punish rebellion, therefore, revenge earth and heaven: I am going: dread you the anger of the gods if Socrates is permitted to live. (Anitus goes out and the judges demur.)

One of the Judges.—I don't care to quarrel with Anitus; he is a dangerous man to offend. If he troubled himself with the gods only it would not signify.

Another Judge.—(To his brother sitting near him.) Between you and me, Socrates is in the right; but then he should not be in the right so publicly. I care no more for Ceres and Neptune than he does; but he should not speak out to the whole Areopagus what he ought to have whispered: yet, after all, what is there in poisoning a philosopher, especially when he is old and ugly?

Another Judge.—If there be any injustice in condemning Socrates, it is Anitus' business and not mine: I lay it all upon his conscience: besides, it grows late, we lose our time; let us talk no more about it: to death with him.

Another.—Ay, ay, they say he's a heretic and an atheist; to death with him.

Mel.—Call Socrates. (He is brought in.) Blessed be the gods, the plurality of voices is for death; Socrates, the gods by us condemn you to drink hemlock.

Soc.—We are all mortal: nature condemns you also to death in a short time, probably you may meet with a more unhappy end than mine: the distempers which bring on death are much more painful than a cup of hemlock. I thank those among my judges who pleaded in favor of innocence; for the rest, they have my pity.

One of the Judges.—(Going out.) Certainly this man deserved a pension from the state, rather than a cup of poison.

Another Judge.—I think so, too; but why would he quarrel with a priest of Ceres?

Another.—After all, it is best to get rid of a philosopher: those fellows have always a certain fierceness of spirit which should be damped a little.

Another.—One word with you, gentlemen: would not it be right, whilst our hand is in, to make an end of all the geometricians, who pretend that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones? They are a mighty scandal to the foolish people that read their works.

Another.—Ay, ay, we'll hang them all the next session; let's go to dinner.

SCENE II.

Socrates.—(Alone.) I have been long prepared for death; all I fear at present is that my wife, Xantippe, will be troubling me in my last moments, and interrupt me in the sweet employment of recollecting my soul and preparing myself for eternity: I ought to busy myself only in the contemplation of that supreme being, before whom I am soon to appear: but here she comes; I must be resigned to all things.

SCENE III.

Socrates, Xantippe, with the Disciples of Socrates.

Xantippe.—Well, my poor man, what have these gentlemen of the law concluded? Have they fined you, are you banished

or acquitted? My God! how uneasy have I been about you! pray take care this don't happen a second time.

Socrates.—No, my dear, this will not happen a second time. I'll answer for it; give yourself no uneasiness about anything. My dear disciples, my friends, welcome.

Crito.—(At the head of his disciples.) You see us, beloved Socrates, no less concerned for you than Xantippe; we have gained permission of the judges to visit you; just heaven! must we behold Socrates in chains! permit us to kiss those bonds which reflect shame on Athens. How could Anitus and his friends reduce you to this condition?

Soc.—Let us think no more of these trifles, my friends, but continue the examination we were making yesterday into the soul's immortality. We observed, I remember, that nothing could be more probable, or at the same time more full of comfort and satisfaction, than this sweet idea; in fact, matter, we know, changes, but perishes not; why, then, should the soul perish? Can it be that, raised as we are to a knowledge of a God through the veil of this mortal body, we should cease to know him when that veil is removed? No, as we think now we must always think; thought is the very essence of man; and this being must appear before a just God, who will recompense virtue, punish vice and pardon weakness and error.

Xan.—Nobly said; but what does this fellow here with his cup? (Enter the jailer, or executioner of the eleven, carrying a cup of hemlock.)

Jailer.—Here, Socrates, the senate have sent you this.

Xan.—Thou vile poisoner of the commonwealth, would you kill my husband before my face? Monster, I'll tear you to pieces.

Soc.—My dear friend, I ask your pardon for my wife's rude behavior: she has scolded me all her life; she only treats you as she does her husband; excuse her impertinence: give me the cup. (He takes the cup.)

One of the Disciples.—O divine Socrates! why may not we take that poison for you? Horrible injustice! shall the guilty thus condemn the innocent, and fools destroy the wise? you go then to death?

Soc.—No, my friends, to life: this is the cup of immortality: it is not this perishable body that has loved and instructed you; it is my soul alone that has lived with you, and that shall love you forever. (He is going to drink.)

Jailer.—I must take off your fetters first; 'tis always done.

Soc.—Do it, then, I beg you. (He scratches his leg.)

One of the Disciples.—You smile!

Soc.—I smile at the reflection that pleasure should arise from pain: thus it is that eternal felicity shall spring from the miseries of this life. (Drinks the poison.)

Cri.—Alas! what have you done?

Xan.—Ay, for a thousand ridiculous discourses of this kind the poor man has lost his life: indeed, my dear, you will break my heart; I could strangle all the judges with my own hands. I did use to scold you, indeed, but I always loved you notwithstanding; these polite, well-bred gentlemen have put you to death: O my dear, dear husband.

Soc.—Be calm, my good Xantippe; weep not, my friends; it becomes not the disciples of Socrates to shed tears.

Cri.—How can we avoid it on so dreadful an occasion? this legal murder!

Soc.—Thus it is that men will often behave to the worshippers of one true God, and the enemies of superstition.

Cri.—And must Socrates be one of those unhappy victims?

Soc.—'Tis noble to be the victim of the deity: I die contented. I wish, indeed, that, to the satisfaction of seeing you, my friends, I could have added the happiness of embracing Sophronimus and Aglae: I wonder they are not here: they would have made my last moments more welcome.

Cri.—Alas! they know not that you have already undergone the judges' dreadful sentence: they have been talking to the people, and praising those magistrates who would have acquitted you. Aglae has laid open the guilt of Anitus, and published his shame and dishonor: they perhaps might have saved your life: O dear Socrates, why would you thus precipitate your fate?

SCENE THE LAST.

Aglae, Sophronimus.

Aglae.—(Entering.) Divine Socrates, be not afraid: be comforted, Xantippe: worthy disciples of Socrates, do not weep.

Sophronimus.—Your enemies are confounded: the people rise in your defence.

Agl.—We have been talking to them; we have laid open the intrigues and jealousy of the wicked Anitus: it was my duty to demand justice for his crime, as I was the cause of it.

Soph.—Anitus hath saved himself by flight from the rage of the people: he and his accomplices are pursued: solemn thanks have been given to those judges who appeared in your favor: the people are now at the gates of the prison, and wait to conduct you home in triumph.

Xantippe.—Alas! 'tis lost labor!

One of the Disciples.—O Socrates, why would you so hastily obey?

Agl.—Live, dear Socrates, the benefactor of your country, the model of future ages; O live for the general happiness of mankind!

Crito.—Ye noble pair, my virtuous friends, it is too late.

Xan.—You stayed too long.

Agl.—Alas! too late? what mean you? just heaven!

Soph.—Has he, then, already drunk the fatal draught?

Socrates.—Sweet Aglae and dear Sophronimus, the law ordained that I should take the poison: I obeyed the law, unjust as it is, because it oppressed myself alone: had the injustice been done to another, I would have resisted it. I go to death, but the example of friendship which you give the world, and your noble soul shall never perish: your virtue is greater, much greater, than the guilt of those who accused me. I bless that fate which the world may call misfortune, because it hath set in the fairest light the goodness of your hearts. My dear Xantippe, be happy; and remember, that to be so you must curb your impetuous temper. My beloved disciples, listen

always to the voice of that philosophy which will teach you to despise your persecutors and pity human weakness: and you, my daughter Aglae, and my son Sophronimus, be always what you now are.

Agl.—How wretched are we that we cannot die for you!

Soc.—Your lives are valuable, mine would have been useless: take my tender last farewell; the doors of eternity are opened to receive me.

Xan.—He was a great man! O I will rouse up the whole nation.

Soph.—May we raise up temples to Socrates, if ever mortal man deserved it!

Cri.—At least may his wisdom teach mankind that temples should be raised to God alone!

WOMAN'S CRAZE FOR TITLES

(LES BOURGEOISES DE QUALITÉ)

OF

F. C. DANCOURT.

(Translated by W. H. H. Chambers.)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

M. NAQUART, Attorney.

M. BLANDINEAU, Lawyer.

THE COUNT.

THE VILLAGE SCHOOLMASTER.

THE VILLAGE CLERK.

MADAME BLANDINEAU,
MADAME RECORDER,
MADAME DEPUTY,
} *Sisters.*

MADAME CARMIN.

ANGÉLIQUE, who loves the Count.

LISETTE, Maid.

CLAUDINE, Maid.

LOLIVE, the Count's Valet.

CASCARET, Lackey.

SCENE—A SMALL VILLAGE IN FRANCE

ARGUMENT.

M. Naquart, a Parisian attorney, had fallen in love, early in life, with a girl who refused him to become Madame Recorder—wife of a small official. She is now an oldish widow, rusticating in a small country village with her sister, Madame Blandineau. M. Naquart comes out to visit his old friend and associate, M. Blandineau, and asks this brother-in-law to propose him to the widow in marriage. Madame Recorder, however, frequents fortune-tellers and astrologers and has been promised the immediate fulfilment of her heart's desire, a titled husband; consequently she spurns M. Naquart, who, though rich, is untitled. Besides, she informs them, she intends that very evening to marry a count, whom she has charmed away from her niece, Angélique. She offers to give this niece to M. Naquart. Angélique learns of the impending marriage, meets the count at the entrance of the village, upbraids him and threatens to marry M. Naquart. The count confesses he is penniless, and as Angélique has no means, he is marrying the widow, who cannot live much longer, he says, solely for her money, which he will share with

Angélique. She spurns the proposition, and he finally swears he will marry no one but Angélique. Meanwhile Madame Blandineau and Madame Deputy, two sisters of Madame Recorder, have discovered that she is to become a countess. Jealous rage makes each threaten to leave her husband unless he in some way procures a title. Their fury increases upon the arrival of a woman, a friend, who has grown rich selling yarn, and has just bought an office for her husband that entitles her to be called president. By a bold device of the attorney and the connivance of the village clerk, Madame Recorder is married to M. Naquart; the count gets Angélique, but allows Madame Naquart to retain the title of countess, while Madame Blandineau becomes Baroness Limpwaddle.

ACT I.

Enter M. Naquart and the Village Clerk.

Naquart.—Now, Clerk, I assure you there will not be the slightest difficulty about it, and as all her family perfectly agree with me, this little subterfuge is merely a trifle.

Clerk.—Very well, as you say. Since you wish it so, I'm willing. You're a Parisian lawyer, I simply a village clerk. Your office is higher, your income larger than mine, and surely it would be impertinence should I seem to require of myself a conscience more scrupulous than yours.

Naq.—Conscience doesn't enter into this matter at all; and between men of the same profession—officials——

Clerk.—That's true, you're right. No one can put into a matter something he never possessed—but it's an ill wind that blows no one good, and it's all the same to me. Provided I'm well paid, and you manage the whole affair and take all the consequences, I've not another word to say.

Naq.—I assume full responsibility for the event and whatever follows.

Clerk.—Very well, agreed; the bargain's struck. I'll go and await your coming. But here's M. Blandineau, who, I think, wishes to speak with you.

Enter M. Blandineau.

Blandineau.—Ah! you are here engaged in some deep conspiracy with our clerk? I trust I do not interrupt?

Naquart.—Not in the slightest: you promised to consent to this marriage, and——

Blan.—Yes, I give it freely and fully; but I cannot promise that my consent will induce my sister-in-law to marry you. She is, as you are aware, very frivolous and giddy; in fact, I am astonished that her many follies have not destroyed any desire you may have had to marry her.

Naq.—I have sworn, M. Blandineau, to make at least one woman a rational creature, and the more giddy and foolish she is when I take her, the more honor shall I merit for the finished product.

Blan.—And the more difficult—nay—impossible, will be your task. My wife is far from being so silly as her sister, yet all my attempts to regulate her mind and manners have, up to this very moment, proved futile. To avoid our daily altercations I shall shortly be reduced, I think, to acting the fool with her, since there seems to be no method of inducing her to act rationally with me.

Naq.—Could you do better? You have plenty of money and no children. Your wife likes to spend freely and loves luxurious display—that's her greatest folly: well, let her show off; for, after all, money is made to use.

Blan.—True; but it would be ridiculous for a plain lawyer like myself——

Naq.—Lawyer or not, when you've made a lot of money enjoy it; 'twould be ridiculous to do otherwise.

Blan.—But formerly, M. Naquart——

Naq.—Formerly, M. Blandineau, people lived according to the customs of former times; let us to-day live according to

the customs of our day and generation; and since by money we live, why not live according to our money?

Blan.—I am opposed to the superfluous, am entirely content with the necessary, and know nothing more charming than the simplicity of the good old days.

Naq.—But if, as in the good old days, you were paid three or four cents (sous) for preparing legal documents which now pay you more than twice as many dollars (pistoles), would this charming simplicity please you so well, M. Blandineau?

Blan.—Oh! not at all, I confess, not at all. It's not our receipts I wish to simplify, but our expenses.

Naq.—We must regulate one by the other, M. Blandineau. With the single exception of her foolish vanity your wife has excellent traits; in fact, her absurdities are wholly the product of your imagination, and the more you try to correct them, the more real they become; while should you attempt to constrain her, you would but win her hatred. Believe me, it is better for both you and your wife that you conform yourself to her fantasies than try to make her submit to yours.

Blan.—That may be your opinion, but it's not mine. How delighted I shall be to see you the husband of my sister-in-law, Madame Recorder. We shall see if you then reason so coolly.

Naq.—You shall have that pleasure, and since you approve my marriage, I shall employ methods to bring it about which otherwise I should not use.

Blan.—And what methods do you propose?

Naq.—I'll tell you: my idea is, first, for you to see if she is inclined to accept me, then we'll regulate our plans according to her answer.

Blan.—I'll not say good-bye, as we shall meet so soon again—nor shall I delay your answer.

Enter Madame Recorder and Lisette.

Madame Recorder.—I cannot rid my mind, Lisette, of these disturbing omens; this will be, I know, an unlucky day for me. I sneezed three times before breakfast; my complexion

is cloudy; my eye misty, nor could I, this morning, give the proper twist to my left-hand curl.

Blandineau.—Ah! you're here, sister, I was just going up to call on you.

Mad. R.—To call on me, brother, and for what purpose? You know I'm not fond of family visits.

Blan.—But this must have been pleasing, since my object is to marry you, sister.

Mad. R.—To marry me, brother, to marry me? Well! this is truly amusing. And who, pray, is the husband-to-be? At least you must tell me his name.

Blan.—A very wealthy old bachelor, M. Naquart, a court attorney.

Mad. R.—An old bachelor for me? An attorney, too, Lisette! M. Naquart! Then I should be Mad. Naquart, should I? a sweet name that, Mad. Naquart! And a pretty fellow, I find this M. Naquart, to think for one moment that I would marry him!

Lisette.—Really, Madame, such insolence merits severe punishment.

Blan.—Pshaw! who are you, anyway, if you please? daughter of the bailiff that was the father of my wife; sister-in-law to me, an ordinary plain lawyer; widow of a scribbling recorder, who literally died of chagrin at your behavior. You're a very fine personage indeed, Madame Recorder!

Mad. R.—Recorder, Monsieur? I beg you, drop the name. My late husband is dead and buried, his business sold and I have no longer rank or title. The petty title of Recorder was but a stepping-stone, and, without egotism, I believe that destiny has in store for me distinctions that will no longer permit such familiarity on your part.

Blan.—More probably you are destined to become wholly a fool, if you go on in this style. Now listen, Madame, you have an opportunity to marry a wealthy and an honest man; if you do not accept him you may rest assured that I am done with you.

Mad. R.—And you may, also, rest assured that when I am a Countess and you still the plain ordinary lawyer, our acquaintance will be of the slightest.

Blan.—What! a Countess! come, don't be a fool.

Mad. R.—I shall start there; it's good enough for a beginning, but I shall rise; and from husband to husband, from dowager to dowager I will make my way, I warrant you; and as quickly as possible, too.

Blan.—(Aside.) We'll have to keep her under lock and key yet.

Mad. R.—(At the rear of the stage.) Hello, there! hello! my lackeys; large lackeys, small lackeys and medium lackeys —carry my train—come forward, coachman. Step in, Madame—After you, Madame—Ah! no, Madame, it is my carriage—Your hand, please, Chevalier. Sit there, my dear Count. Drive on, coachman. 'Tis a fine thing, a carriage! Fine to have one's own carriage! (She leaves).

Blan.—And that's a carriage that will take her to the madhouse. She seems to have lost all the wit she ever had, Lisette, and I must rid my home one way or another of her presence as quickly as possible, so that my wife may not have so ridiculous an example to follow.

Lis.—You have nothing to fear on that score, Monsieur. Your wife is too sensible: she does not take after her family.

Blan.—My wife is sensible?

Lis.—Assuredly; and you should take it kindly of her, for she has, I assure you, every talent needed to make her as foolish as another.

Blan.—Yes, I've every reason, by all the infernal powers, to know she has them; that's the worst of it.

Enter Madame Blandineau.

Lisette.—(Low.) Hush, be quiet, Monsieur, here she is; do not stir her up.

Mad. B.—And, pray, what do you find to amuse you, Mademoiselle Lisette? I've been wanting you for an hour. Come, quickly, my cloak.

Lis.—Which one, Madame?

Mad. B.—The latest, of course. (Lisette leaves.) Ah! you're here, are you, Monsieur Blandineau; I'm very glad of that, for, as I'm entirely out of money, you can give me some.

Blandineau.—Give you money, Madame? Why, but yesterday you had twenty-five louis.

Mad. B.—True enough, Monsieur; but I have played, I have lost and I have paid—nothing remains. I am about to play again, and I need money in case of loss.

Blan.—Really, wife——

Mad. B.—For shame! Monsieur Blandineau, your manner implies reproach when you ought to thank me for taking your money.

Blan.—Thank you?

Mad. B.—Yes, thank me. 'Tis only badly acquired wealth from which no profit can be wrung: I lose your money constantly.

Blan.—Then why do you play, Madame?

Mad. B.—Why do I play, Monsieur? why do I play? A pretty question! What would you have me do, and above all, in the country? I was soft enough to accompany you and your tiresome relatives to this miserable, out-of-the-way hole. Now, it so happens, that in the village there are some people accustomed to good society. We meet to pass the time agreeably, play being the very soul of our parties: and I shall not play! No, Monsieur, you need not count on such an absurdity; and, if you please, give me some money; otherwise I shall borrow it in your name.

Blan.—Very well, Madame, here's ten louis more; if you lose them——

Mad. B.—If I don't lose, I shall spend them, so you need not concern yourself about the matter further. By the way, to-day is the village fête; we, the persons of most importance, will dine them here; but you, I believe, are fully aware of this fact——

Blan.—What! notwithstanding all I have said, you still persist in that ridiculous project?

Mad. B.—It was your talk and remonstrances, Monsieur, which finally determined me to give it.

Blan.—Madame Blandineau, you will force me to take extreme measures——

Mad. B.—Monsieur Blandineau, you will make me do things——

Blan.—I defy you to do worse.

Mad. B.—Ah! indeed! Monsieur; am I a flirt? or a libertine?

Blan.—Worse than that, Madame! what utter folly to bring together here eight or ten women, each more ridiculous than the other, not one a true friend, to drink and eat up our good money!

Mad. B.—My! but you have a sordid soul, Monsieur Blandineau! A sordid soul, I say; and little too you know how to make the most of your position. I believe in putting my best foot forward; that's my weakness.

Blan.—One with as little sense as you display ought to hide from the world.

Mad. B.—You see, Monsieur, the results of your attempted interference with the dinner. Very well, now we shall have music, some violins, a little concert, followed by a ball, and if you continue, even an operetta.

Blan.—What senseless luxury! Were you the wife of a public contractor, you would scarcely dare to be more extravagant.

Mad. B.—'Tis our sister who pays the bill, so you need not worry.

Blan.—The foolish woman!

Enter Lisette.

Lisette.—Here is your cloak, Madame.

Madame Blandineau.—(To M. Blandineau.) Good-bye, my dear. (To Lisette.) Call Cascaret, that he may carry my train. (Lisette leaves.)

Blan.—Your train, Madame Blandieau? Do I understand that you want to have a train carried?

Mad. B.—Yes, Monsieur Blandineau; you understand me correctly. My train shall be carried in public, so that I may not appear like one of the common herd.

Enter Lisette, followed by Cascaret.

Blandineau.—But my wife——

Madame Blandineau.—No further buts nor disputes, husband. Let there be candles a-plenty, Lisette, and above all, well laid covers.

Lisette.—Yes, Madame.

Mad. B.—Jasmin and Cascaret shall rinse the glasses, the god-son and cousin of Monsieur shall pour the wine and his chief clerk serve them at table.

Blan.—My chief clerk? He'll do nothing of the sort.

Mad. B.—Oh! yes, he will, my dear, I've already asked him; he is not nearly so impolite as you; nor would he dare to oppose me.

Blan.—But, Madame Blandineau, think——

Mad. B.—Don't put yourself out at all, my dear; if the company does not please you we can easily dispense with your society.

Blan.—Oh! by gad! I'll be there, I warrant you—and you shall see——(Mad. Blandineau leaves, Cascaret carrying her train.)

Lis.—She's a masterful woman, Monsieur, a brilliant manager. To make a butler of a chief clerk is clever, to say the least.

Blan.—I'm sure he will not do such a foolish thing.

Lis.—He'll do it, Monsieur. He and Madame are very good friends indeed; he does all she asks.

Blan.—Don't you think, Lisette, that my wife is getting a trifle off in the upper story?

Lis.—No, Monsieur, on the contrary, I think she shows the best of sense; she takes her pleasure wherever she finds it, while you have all the trouble and chagrin. Who of the two is most foolish?

Blan.—Oh! I, without a doubt. My opinion is, however, that her sister's example is ruining her; therefore, I wish to be rid of that silly creature; if possible, without being obliged to quarrel with my wife. That is the reason I desire to marry her to M. Naquart.

Lis.—What does it matter to you whom she takes, provided only she marries. In fact, Monsieur, I suspect her of another and secret plan which she will find difficult to keep from me. Let me pry into her feelings a little and trust me to impart to you my discoveries.

Blan.—Very well, Lisette, do so quickly. I'll go to M. Naquart, and together we'll await your news.

Lis.—Go, Monsieur, you shall have it without delay, trust me for that. (M. Blandineau leaves.) (Alone.) This poor man is to be pitied—but here comes a sweet creature who is more to be pitied even than he, although her misfortune is of an entirely different nature.

Enter Angélique.

Angélique.—At leisure, Lisette, and yet you did not come to me? How cruel to leave me alone with my woes and not, when possible, to cheer me with your company.

Lisette.—I can't accommodate the whole family. All seem to want me at once: Mad. Blandineau to rail against her husband; the husband to complain to me of his wife; Madame Recorder to tell me of her fine apparel and deadly charms; and you to speak of your lover. Plenty of occupation, you see, in this household.

Ang.—What silly old aunts I have, Lisette, and how unfortunate I am to be without means or relatives other than these; and a heart filled with tender passion for such a perfidious lover.

Lis.—I cannot understand why, during the week we have been here, you have not heard from him. He must be sick or dead.

Ang.—Worse, Lisette; he is fickle. Some days before our departure, you will remember, we met together in your room; he came an hour later than usual and remained a much shorter time; he was uneasy, absent-minded and embarrassed; he was beginning to love me no longer, and absence has made him forget me altogether.

Lis.—If that be true, your aunts are the cause.

Ang.—How I hate them, Lisette!

Lis.—One was in truth only too favorably inclined to him, but she did not wish him to have the same feeling toward you.

Ang.—Yes, I fear you're right, you mean my aunt Madame Recorder, of course; I thought she loved him.

Lis.—Precisely; and that alone is sufficient to scare away a handsome fellow; then, besides, Madame Blandineau, on her own account, not wishing to see you a greater lady than herself, has done all she could to drive him away by brusque treatment. 'Twas these things, I vow, that have kept him away.

Ang.—What injustice! and how much more I love him than he ever loved me. The more they forbade me to see and speak with him, the greater the joy and delight his presence and conversation gave me, Lisette.

Lis.—That's due more to obstinacy than love.

Ang.—Oh! no, I assure you——

Lis.—Oh! yes it is, yes it is; you're a female and delight in contrariness which will often, of itself, account for more than one-half of our tender passions.

Enter Lolive.

Angélique.—Ah! dear Lisette, here comes Lolive; his master is not inconstant. How happy I am!

Lisette.—Heaven be praised! I'm delighted.

Lolive.—I'm truly fortunate, Madamoiselle, to find you before any one——

Ang.—Give me my letters, quickly.

Lo.—But I have no letters to give you, Madamoiselle.

Ang.—You have no letters for me; pray, then, what brings you here? What is your master doing?

Lo.—Doing badly, Madamoiselle; he is a traitor who merits the gallows; a dog unworthy to live.

Lis.—A fine eulogy!

Ang.—What do you mean?

Lis.—Did he send you here to tell us this?

Lo.—No; but he'll be here shortly himself to prove I'm right.

Ang.—He's coming here? For what purpose?

Lo.—To commit the greatest folly: to marry your aunt.

Ang.—To marry my aunt, Lisette!

Lis.—To marry your aunt? That cannot be done.

Lo.—Indeed it can; it's not the one who has already a husband; it's the widow, Madame Recorder. And I have here a letter for her, which I am to deliver as soon as possible.

Ang.—A letter for her. Give it to me, I must see it.

Lo.—No, Madamoiselle, you cannot see it. I've had already on account of this affair a hundred blows; and I know when I've got enough. I beg you do not let him suspect that I have even hinted of this matter. (He leaves.)

Ang.—Has my aunt become such a fool that she wishes to marry the Count?

Lis.—No, he's the fool for wanting to marry her.

Ang.—He doesn't want to, Lisette; it must be simply a pretext to be near me. He is deceiving her; my aunt loves to flatter herself. You'll see that it will turn out quite differently from what you imagine.

Lis.—She is evidently not the only one who loves to flatter herself.

Ang.—It doesn't matter; but don't you deceive me, dear Lisette. I shall go to await the Count at the entrance of the village. I wish to speak with him first and learn the truth from his own lips; nor will I leave him until he has promised to marry no one but me.

Lis.—It's a good idea to hunt him up—finding is keeping, you know.

Ang.—That's true. But come with me, won't you, please, Lisette?

Lis.—No, take a village maiden and let me meanwhile speak with your aunt. Trust me to win from her some disclosure that will not prove useless.

ACT II.

Enter Madame Recorder and the Schoolmaster.

Madame Recorder.—Be sure and give it all a sprightly turn, Monsieur Schoolmaster, a sprightly turn, remember.

Schoolmaster.—Rest easy, Madame: provided the young fellows do not want for wine, nor the girls for cakes, and that you pay me the sixty francs for the fiddlers, and the little songs I shall stick in here and there we will enliven your party in sprightly fashion, I warrant you.

Mad. R.—Well, here are three louis, Monsieur Schoolmaster; that is more than you ask.

School.—Good! so much the better! I'll furnish a trifle or two more than I agreed, and as I suspect you intend to remarry, I'll make your epi——your epi——

Mad. R.—What! my epitaph?

School.—No, by gad! quite the contrary; your epithalamium, I think it's called; I'm not sure just how it's pronounced, but the verses shall be in your praise, that's certain.

Mad. R.—Do not fail, especially, to clearly indicate the happy omens of this end of the century. They are so happy for me, that I wish to show my gratitude publicly.

School.—Oh! by gad! trust me for that. I'm at least as well satisfied as you. I've lost my wife, my wine is good and harvest bountiful, so I bid fair to be completely at my ease. Indeed, my song will be full-throated, and the girls I dance with shall shake like jelly.

Mad. R.—Well, remember it's for this evening, Schoolmaster, and these verses in my honor——

School.—Oh! they shall be finished directly. 'Tis not difficult to praise you, Madame, for you are beautiful, generous and rich.

Mad. R.—I am young, also, Monsieur Schoolmaster.

School.—Would you have that mentioned, too? Very well, I'm willing; everything counts; you'll surely tip me something for the age.

Mad. R.—Be careful not to forget it.

School.—'Tis wise. I'll date the song and 'twill serve as a baptismal certificate. Good-bye, Madame, your generous treatment has pleased me and I promise you shall be pleased with the date.

Mad. R.—Good-bye, Monsieur Schoolmaster. (The Schoolmaster leaves.) (Alone.) How delighted I am! What a charming future awaits me! Oh! happy moments, happy moments! I can scarce contain myself for joy.

Enter Lisette.

Lisette.—Really, Madame, I am told that you have filled the whole village with joy. Is it because of the fête, or have you your own particular reason for rejoicing?

Madam Recorder.—The evil omens of this morning have vanished, my dear Lisette. I have received the most agreeable news.

Lis.—'Twould be perhaps indiscreet, Madame, were I to ask you its nature?

Mad. R.—Let them blame soothsayers as much as they please; for myself, I am very well pleased with Duverger's predictions.

Lis.—Why so, Madame?

Mad. R.—Because they're coming true; they're already at my finger's end, dear Lisette.

Lis.—Pray what, Madame?

Mad. R.—The fortunate century-end and my happiness.

Lis.—But the end of the century and your happiness—what have they in common, Madame?

Mad. R.—I've had but little pleasure during this century, but my luck will change with it, and hereafter I shall have a most agreeable time.

Lis.—Fine predictions!

Mad. R.—I'm a widow to start with——

Lis.—That's promising.

Mad. R.—And I shall not remain one much longer.

Lis.—Is that so, Madame?

Mad. R.—Yes, 'tis the season of revolutions, you know, and you shall see a very pretty change in my condition.

Lis.—Ah! and this change?

Mad. R.—After to-day I shall be a woman of rank.

Lis.—A woman of rank! That doesn't surprise me, at all. Your manner shows that you are clearly intended for high life.

Mad. R.—'Tis without affectation—purely natural to me.

Lis.—And what lord is to be so fortunate as to make you a woman of rank?

Mad. R.—The little Count, my dear Lisette, the little Count.

Lis.—What! the little Count? He who loved your niece?

Mad. R.—You mean who feigned to love my niece, so that he could be near me.

Lis.—Ah! the little rascal.

Mad. R.—We worked that cleverly, didn't we?

Lis.—But why should you work any scheme? you are entirely your own mistress.

Mad. R.—Delight in mystery, my child, the charm of hoodwinking. I had even planned to elope. Oh! what a delightful experience it must be to elope.

Lis.—Yes, it has merits.

Mad. R.—We should have been married secretly—incognito—under private seal to avoid the customs of ordinary people.

Lis.—'Twas nobly planned!

Mad. R.—But the delightful pleasure of making my impertinent brother-in-law fume under our very eyes; the joy of witnessing the exasperation of my sister and niece; the satisfaction to be derived from the despair of all the women of my acquaintance, have induced us to be married here. 'Tis all very gratifying, I assure you.

Lis.—And most gracious; you're quite right.

Mad. R.—The Count's valet has arrived and the Count himself will soon be here; 'twill then be made public.

Lis.—Is it not so already, Madame?

Enter Madame Blandineau and Madame Deputy.

Lisette.—Here is your sister and your cousin. They both appear excited.

Madame Blandineau.—(To Mad. R.) What does this mean, sister? There's a very surprising rumor circulating 'round the village.

Madame Deputy.—(To Mad. R.) The most ridiculous rumor.

Madame Recorder.—Ridiculous, in what way? And, pray, what is this rumor?

Mad. B.—That you are to marry the Count; an impecunious rattle-headed nobleman. The rumor seems to me contrary to all probability.

Mad. R.—'Tis nevertheless true, sister; and now that I am, thank heaven! a Countess, we shall no longer figure in the same class.

Mad. B.—Countess, you? You a Countess, sister?

Mad. R.—Say, Madame, Madame Blandineau, and, only Madame, you understand?

Mad. B.—Only Madame, ah! I shall faint. My sister a Countess and I but a lawyer's wife. A chair, quickly, Lisette.

Lis.—Steady, Madame, steady.

Mad. D.—And you are to be a Countess, you, my cousin?

Mad. R.—Cousin me no longer, Madame Deputy, cousin me no longer.

Mad. D.—Quickly, an arm chair, Lisette; help me.

Lis.—For heaven's sake! be patient a moment.

Mad. D.—I am weak in the knees and short of breath; I shall die, I know I shall.

Mad. B.—Listen, sister, I know your object; you wish to get the upper hand of me, because you're older; you've always been crazy to do it, but I'll separate from my husband if he lets you get the best of me. Oh! you'll have plenty of opposition; trust us for that.

Mad. D.—(To Mad. B.) The family must not sit quietly by with folded hands: we must stir ourselves, cousin.

Mad. R.—Well, stir yourselves; stir yourselves as much as you please; meanwhile, I shall be stirring also, I promise you.

Lis.—(Aside.) Great heavens, what excitement! This is a lively family.

Mad. R.—Pretty creatures, they are indeed! To try and prevent my rising. This small fry is so ridiculous that——

Mad. B.—Small fry, Madame Deputy, small fry!

Mad. D.—(To Mad. B.) Heavens! small fry! and I by the grace of God, daughter, sister and niece of a notary—and the wife of a deputy, cousin.

Mad. B.—(To Mad. D.) And I, my cousin, who had more than thirteen thousand francs in marriage, as much in ready money as in clothes, furnishings and jewels. She makes me mad all over.

Mad. D.—And my blood boil.

Mad. R.—I'm getting furious, I warn you; look out for yourselves.

Lis.—There, there, hush, ladies. Be more moderate, I pray. Do you wish to have the whole village laughing at you? besides, here is that big woolen merchant, Madame Carmin, of Lombard street, who has, you know, an evil tongue.

Enter Madame Carmin.

Madame Carmin.—Good-day, my dear Madame Blandineau.

Madame Blandineau.—Very glad to see you, Madame Carmin.

Mad. C.—I cannot dine with you to-night; I shall return to Paris. I came to bid you good-bye, my dears.

Madame Recorder.—Ah! do not leave before to-morrow, I beg; you surely will not refuse to be a witness——

Mad. C.—I cannot delay my departure. I've just received word of an affair, the conclusion of which I have been impatiently awaiting: it is finished and I must leave.

Madame Deputy.—Ah! and may I ask what affair, Madame Carmin? some bargain in English or Flanders wool?

Mad. C.—Pshaw! far from that. I'm quitting business; I've grown rich and trade is now beneath me. I'm buying an office for my husband and becoming a President.

Mad. B.—You President, Madame Carmin?

Mad. C.—Yes, myself.

Mad. D.—Madame Carmin, President!

Mad. C.—Yes, Madame.

Mad. R.—And I, Countess, Madame Carmin.

Mad. C.—You a Countess, Madame?

Mad. R.—Yes, President.

Mad. C.—I'm delighted to hear it, Countess.

Mad. B.—(Aside.) This takes my breath; I can stand it no longer.

Mad. D.—(Aside.) It's enough to kill any one; I shall never recover.

Lisette.—'Tis truly great good fortune! Ah! Madame Carmin will fill that office cleverly.

Mad. C.—Oh! I shall not fill it, but my husband; of course, I shall advise him what to do in certain circumstances.

Mad. R.—It will be well to be numbered among your friends.

Mad. C.—'Tis only a country office, it is true, but there are great advantages—fine prerogatives——

Mad. D.—And what are these fine prerogatives, Madame?

Mad. C.—Well, in the first place the President in that district is absolutely the master. There are, I believe, in his whole jurisdiction no lawyers of any sort, and the President can point to himself with pride as alone representing justice. That, of itself, is very charming, ladies.

Mad. B.—Yes, truly charming to see M. Carmin the sole judge—he who knows neither law nor practice; and, perchance, cannot even read or write!

Mad. C.—Oh! excuse me, Madame Blandineau, he'll sign his name freely enough and with a flourish besides, in honor of his office.

Mad. D.—But to know how to sign one's name isn't all that's needed; it is necessary first, to judge.

Mad. C.—That's a mere bagatelle. There's a country clerk who looks after everything for thirty or forty francs a year. And, besides, with common sense and a little wit he can judge things off-hand. That's good enough for country people, anyway.

Lis.—Undoubtedly; and the most learned judges are not always the fairest.

Mad. C.—After all, it doesn't concern me. What I'm after is rank—a title that will distinguish me, and this office furnishes it. M. Carmin loves the country and his ease. Let him judge the best he can. He'll live content in the country while I shall live in Paris as President.

Mad. R.—And I as Countess. We'll meet frequently, President.

Mad. C.—Good-bye, my dear Madame Blandineau. Upon my return we'll have some good times together.

Mad. B.—Good-bye, Madame Carmin. A pleasant trip to you.

Mad. D.—(To Mad. Carmin.) The last yarn you sold me is rotten, I shall return it to you, Madame the President.

Mad. C.—They'll exchange it for you, Madame Deputy. (To Mad. R.) Good-bye, charming Countess.

Mad. R.—(To Mad. C.) Good-bye, my dear President.

(Mad. Recorder and Mad. Carmin bow profoundly to each other a number of times. Mad. Carmin leaves.)

Lis.—(Aside.) How polite quality-folk are to each other! (Aloud.) Well, here's two women that have struck luck, anyway.

Mad. B.—I won't stand it any longer; M. Blandineau must buy something that will ennoble me or I'll have nothing more to do with him. (She leaves.)

Mad. D.—My husband must cease to be simply a deputy or I shall cease to be his wife. (She leaves.)

Lis.—Courage, Madame Recorder, the battlefield remains to you alone, and at least a dozen untitled women will burst of envy over this affair.

Mad. R.—'Tis my brother-in-law I long to most affect. He called me a fool when I spoke of becoming a Countess. I sincerely hope he will become a fool when he learns that I spoke the truth.

Lis.—(Low.) But here he comes with M. Naquart.

Mad. R.—(Low.) You shall see how I'll receive them.

Enter M. Blandineau and M. Naquart.

Blandineau.—Well, sister, have you thought over the proposition I made you a short time ago? What have you decided?

Madame Recorder.—That a brother-in-law is a very persecuting animal, M. Blandineau.

Naquart.—'Tis under the auspices of Monsieur that I take the liberty——

Mad. R.—Good day, Monsieur Naquart, you love me, I'm told; I believe it. But I do not love you at all, I tell you; believe it or not, as you please.

Blan.—But, sister-in-law——

Mad. R.—But, brother-in-law—do not speak of it again; my mind—the court of last resort—has given judgment: there is no appeal. When I have once made up my mind, nothing can change my decision; ask Lisette.

Lisette.—'Tis one of Madame's finest traits.

Naq.—I had believed Madame——

Mad. R.—You're an infidel, Monsieur Naquart.

Naq.—That having paid you my first addresses, in days gone by, I——

Mad. R.—Well, times have changed, Monsieur Naquart; I was nothing but a child, a simpleton. I do remember that I had a sort of silly weakness for you, a fondness which might have led to my being your widow to-day.

Naq.—My widow, Madame?

Mad. R.—Certainly. My star decreed that I should become a widow at a certain time. It's not at all likely that my star would have disappointed me in your favor.

Blan.—Well, the first danger is over, let Monsieur Naquart risk the second.

Mad. R.—No, I advise him not to take the chance, for my star is terribly hard on husbands. According to my calculations, there are three or four yet to be exterminated in a short time, and men of rank, too; you can imagine how long a poor devil of an attorney would last.

Lis.—(Whispers to Mad. R.) What! Madame, you love the Count and yet are so hard-hearted that you expose him to this malignant influence?

Mad. R.—(Whispers to Lisette.) Yes, to combat it, my dear Lisette; the younger the man the more the resistance.

Lis.—(Whispers to Mad. R.) You are right; he couldn't find any fault with that.

Naq.—I shall not, then, have the happiness to possess you, Madame? to be near you?

Blan.—You're a greater fool than she, Monsieur Naquart.

Lis.—(Whispers to Mad. R.) This man loves you madly.

Mad. R.—(Whispers to Lisette.) My, how troublesome to merit so much love! (Aloud.) If you are so desirous of being near me, Monsieur Naquart, marry my niece; she's my other self, and I'll give her to you.

Lis.—(Aside.) Well, well, I like that!

Naq.—Are you serious, Madame?

Mad. R.—Yes, certainly; you will even please me. The poor child! I must do something for her. I charmed her lover, the Count, away; I marry him this evening—more through vanity than love; less for his qualities of mind and heart than his rank. Title, 'tis the one thing I long for; come what will, I must have title; 'tis my frailty.

Blan.—And you would marry Angélique's lover, the Count?

Mad. R.—Most assuredly. And, as I have stolen her lover, I send mine, M. Naquart, to her in exchange. A fair exchange is no robbery, and you can even let her understand, Lisette, that I give more than I take.

Lis.—Then you ought to ask something to boot, Madame. I shall seek her out as quickly as possible to impart this happy news. (Aside.) How joyful I shall make her! (She leaves.)

Naq.—Think carefully what you are doing, Madame, before you enter into this engagement.

Mad. R.—I give you my niece, Monsieur Naquart.

Naq.—When the contract is ready to be signed, pray do not retract.

Mad. R.—I, retract, Monsieur Naquart! retract! A Countess go back on her word! Ah! have no fear of that. You are familiar with these matters; have my marriage contract and your own, as well, prepared at the same time and as quickly as possible. As soon as the Count arrives we'll sign.

Blan.—But this Count——

Mad. R.—Listen; don't you dare to be wanting in respect to me when he arrives, Monsieur Blandineau. And now, attorneys, the Countess bids you farewell. (She leaves.)

Blan.—Her folly seems to have reached high-water mark; but I warn you, I shall not permit her to marry that young fellow.

Naq.—Oh! she'll not marry him. Leave that to me.

Blan.—A ruined fellow who hasn't a penny in the world.

Naq.—I know his affairs better than anyone else. I am not only his attorney, but his trustee as well, and he shall do nothing that I do not approve; so rest easy.

Enter Claudine.

Claudine.—Oh! come quickly, Monsieur, to Madame. She's gasping for breath and seems about ready to die—all because Madame Recorder is to be a Countess.

Blandineau.—Another fool!

Clau.—Madame Deputy is with her and carrying on just as badly. First they sit down; then, no quicker down they're up; moaning and lamenting all the while; each has slapped my face twice, because I couldn't keep myself from laughing. (She leaves.)

Blan.—How disgusting it is, Monsieur Naquart, to find only these silly, idiotic women wherever one turns.

Naquart.—They'll be wiser later on in life. Meanwhile, let us fully enjoy our wealth, and, by accommodating ourselves for a season to their follies and ridiculous notions, we can gently and gradually lead them back to the realms of sense.

ACT III.

Enter Angélique and the Count.

Angélique.—Count, you drive me to despair.

Count.—Charming Angélique, I adore you!

Ang.—And you hope to prove your adoration by becoming the husband of my aunt?

Count.—What would you have me do? You are penniless, while I have neither office nor revenue; and the law-suit I have just lost has completely ruined me. Birth and rank in my present condition are simply burdens. Could I ever forgive myself if I made you a partner in my unhappiness?

Ang.—Yes, for I would rather share your unhappiness than see you happy with my aunt.

Count.—But I should not be happy with her at all, I assure you; I'm not marrying the woman, but her money, which I mean to share with you.

Ang.—I do not wish it, Monsieur. I do not want money; I want only you.

Count.—Believe me, you possess my whole heart and shall always possess it. I shall cherish, worship, fairly idolize you all my life.

Ang.—But you will not marry me? That doesn't suit me in the least.

Count.—How cruel you are! Permit me to submit for a time to our evil fortune that we may insure a better. We are both young, and your aunt certainly cannot live very much longer.

Ang.—Think you I shall have the patience to await her end? No, indeed, I wish you to marry me first; my aunt has already been married, it's her turn to wait.

Count.—But what can we do? what will become of us? how shall we live?

Ang.—By mutual love; 'tis all I ask; will it not suffice you?

Count.—Charming Angélique! most adorable!

Enter Lisette.

Angélique.—Don't say so many sweet things, but love me more. (Seeing Lisette.) Ah! you here, dear Lisette; you have come just in time to help me bring the Count to reason. He obstinately persists upon marrying my aunt for her fortune.

Lisette.—Well, goodness gracious! let him do it; meanwhile, you marry someone that will make yours. M. Naquart is richer than your aunt, and you have only to say one word to become his wife.

Count.—She—marry Monsieur, my lawyer?

Lis.—Why not? This lawyer has already succeeded in getting a considerable part of your wealth; he can surely add the sweetheart. He and the aunt have come to terms, and all now depends on Mademoiselle only.

Ang.—Very well, then, Count, marry my aunt, if you like. M. Naquart will revenge me.

Count.—And you would consent to this union?

Ang.—Must we not submit to our evil fortune? Are we not both young? I shall be a widow as soon, at least, as you a widower.

Lis.—Oh! I'll guarantee that.

Count.—And I shall see you in the arms of another?

Ang.—We'll meet occasionally; I'll permit you to call when we've both grown rich.

Count.—Angélique, you drive me to despair.

Ang.—'Tis you, Count, that did the first driving.

Count.—Be merciful; keep yourself entirely for me.

Ang.—Keep me yourself; but pray, why should I not be permitted the same privilege you exact?

Lis.—Both should have the same rights and privileges; 'tis but just.

Count.—Very well, then, I shall not marry your aunt, I pledge you.

Ang.—But if you do not marry me quickly, I pledge you, I shall marry M. Naquart.

Count.—I'll find a means to prevent.

Enter M. Naquart.

Angélique.—(Whispers to Lisette.) My, but he's ugly, Lisette!

Naquart.—Ah! you are the very one I'm looking for, Count. They just told me you had arrived.

Count.—I'm delighted to meet you, Monsieur; I wish to tell you that——

Naq.—As I am now engaged in a matter that concerns you, I should like a few moments' conversation before I give my final orders.

Count.—Before ending the matter as you propose, you must find a way to end my life.

Naq.—Don't be rash.

Ang.—(To M. Naquart.) I am also concerned in this affair, am I not, Monsieur?

Naq.—Yes, Mademoiselle.

Ang.—Very well, Monsieur, if it depends upon me the marriage shall never take place. Unless the Count has the impertinence to marry my aunt I shall never be fool enough to marry you—depend upon it.

Lisette.—Truly, a polite refusal!

Naq.—Which ought, I suppose, to dishearten me; but I have sworn to make you happy, and I shall ask the Count himself to induce you to do as I wish.

Count.—What! me, Monsieur?

Ang.—Oh! I shall do as he does. It behooves him to be on his guard as to the example offered.

Naq.—(To Angélique.) Kindly permit me to speak with him. Meanwhile, go with Lisette to the village clerk's, where you will find nearly all your family. We will follow you almost immediately, and if the marriage contracts I have had prepared meet with your approval, we'll sign them; if not——

Ang.—They will not meet with my approval, Monsieur, I warrant you.

Naq.—Perchance the contracts will bestow benefits upon you which may make you open your eyes.

Ang.—The more my eyes are opened the less desirable I shall find you, Monsieur; this is certain.

Naq.—No one wishes to force your inclination; but please go to the clerk's.

Ang.—I do not wish to go without the Count.

Lis.—(To Angélique.) Pshaw! who not? Come, don't be foolish; no one will force you to sign.

Ang.—Do not permit yourself, Count, to be argued into marrying my aunt; I warn you, I shall marry Monsieur out of spite. (Angélique and Lisette leave.)

Naq.—Well, now, Monsieur, at last we are alone. Tell me sincerely, what are you doing here?

Count.—I came to seek a refuge from the misery to which I am about to be reduced through the unfortunate condition of my affairs.

Naq.—And, according to what I am told, this refuge is the house of Madame Recorder, whom you intend to marry?

Count.—You have been correctly informed; 'tis my intention. She has houses, bonds and sixty thousand francs in ready money which I will command. I'll go into business.

Naq.—A man of your rank go into business!

Count.—Why not? Business men buy our lands, usurp our titles, and even our names; is it not fitting that we follow their calling, so that some day we may be able to reënter our homes and position?

Naq.—I can afford you an opportunity of entering in another manner, if you will follow my advice.

Count.—Alas! Monsieur Naquart, I owe my undoing to your advice. I was offered an advantageous compromise, you prevented my accepting it and the suit was lost.

Naq.—You should have had a unanimous verdict in your favor, but there were only young judges on the bench and our adversary was a pretty woman. How could we possibly be right!

Count.—These reflections are as sad as they are useless; we cannot retrace our steps. The only thing left for me is to seek a refuge from poverty. A rich widow opens her arms, I must throw myself into them without hesitation.

Naq.—But Angélique loves you and you return the tender passion.

Count.—Alas! Monsieur, I shall probably die of sorrow because of my inability to make her happy.

Naq.—We must find a method. But here comes Madame Recorder; continue your present affectionate relations with her and join me later at the village clerk's, where I, with Angélique, will await you.

Count.—I shall be there, Monsieur, as soon as possible. (M. Naquart leaves.)

Enter Madame Recorder and Lolive.

Lolive.—(To Mad. R., seeing the Count.) He went, of course, first to your house, Madame; he will be very sorry that he missed you.

Madame Recorder.—(Without seeing the Count.) But what road could he have taken? I awaited him in the shady lane; apart from the fact that it is the shortest and most pleasant route, intuitive desire ought to have drawn him to it.

Lo.—His intuition must have gone back on him, Madame.

Mad. R.—(Seeing the Count.) Ah! here he is.

Count.—Madame, I——

Mad. R.—Is it really you, my dearest Count? You were searching for me, I was searching for you, we were searching for each other. Love led one to the other and Hymen will unite us; what felicity! Do you fully appreciate your bliss, dearest Count, and will you always love me as ardently as you write?

Count.—Your inquiry wrongs me, Madame—my love and devotion must continue as long as your charms.

Mad. R.—As long as my charms? Ah! dearest Count, make them eternal, I beg.

Count.—They shall be, I promise you, Madame.

Lo.—Yes, each time that you, Madame, renew your charms, Monsieur's love will revive.

Mad. R.—Am I really awake? Is it not a dream? Am I indeed myself? Is it possible that I have conquered so noble a heart?

Count.—How could I resist, Madame? (Aside.) Indispensable necessity compelled me.

Mad. R.—My dearest Count, 'tis the star; Duverger always told me——

Count.—(Whispering.) Lolive, this silly old fool already makes me very tired.

Mad. R.—What's that you're saying, charming Count?

Count.—I said, Madame, that——

Lo.—He said that his trip had made him very tired.

Mad. R.—'Tis true: he looks it.

Lo.—Oh! he'll come around all right, Madame.

Mad. R.—Yes, indeed. I shall feed him on strong soup and broth. I ordered gruel prepared before I left; you shall have plenty of good gruel, my dearest Count.

Count.—Gruel for me, Madame?

Mad. R.—Yes, dearest Count, 'tis very nourishing—and refreshing. Trust me to regulate your diet and keep you in the best of health; you know how near and dear it is to me.

Count.—I'm much indebted to you, Madame—— (Low, to Lolive.) Damn the silly fool with her gruel!

Lo.—As my health is so near and dear to you, Madame, I shall need only wine, and plenty of it, if you please, to refresh me.

Mad. R.—Don't worry, you will want for nothing.

Enter the Schoolmaster.

Schoolmaster.—Madame, the boys and girls with the fiddlers have assembled beneath the village elm to rehearse the trifles that I composed at your command. Come and hear them.

Madame Recorder.—No, bring them here.

School.—Here? Very well, I'll bring them; 'twill not, per-

haps, go smoothly at first, but we'll do better this evening. (He leaves.)

Count.—Really, Madame, what does this mean?

Mad. R.—Oh! just a little fête to celebrate your arrival. Some songs and verses that I have had prepared for you.

Count.—For me, Madame?

Mad. R.—For you, for me, for all of us.

Count.—'Tis very kind and clever, I'm sure. While you are managing the rehearsal, kindly permit me to look after a little affair of my own which needs attention and makes me somewhat ill at ease.

Mad. R.—Then go, by all means, dearest Count, but hasten your return, I beg.

Count.—With all possible speed. Follow me, Lolive.

Mad. R.—Good-bye, my dearest Count.

Lolive.—Good-bye, my dearest Countess. (The Count and Lolive leave.)

Mad. R.—(Alone.) The handsome fellow! He was made for me, I was made for him, and 'twas love, without a doubt, who formed each for the other.

Enter Madame Blandineau.

Madame Blandineau.—My dear sister, permit me to embrace you. All my troubles are over, nor have I longer the slightest ill will toward you. I offer my congratulations upon your becoming a Countess. Now congratulate me: I am a Baroness.

Madame Recorder.—You a Baroness, my dear sister?

Mad. B.—Yes, my dear Countess, 'tis fully determined. M. Blandineau sells his practice and gives forty thousand francs for the Barony of Limpwaddle: the deal is settled. I am no longer Madame Blandineau, but the Baroness Limpwaddle, at this very moment.

Mad. R.—That is truly charming, sister, sweetly pretty! My sister, the Baroness! Your sister, the Countess, is delighted, and our family now made most illustrious.

Mad. B.—Our cousin, Madame Deputy, will die of vexation, while Madame Substitute will hang herself. We shall have a lot of sorry countenances 'round our table this evening.

Mad. R.—We must act with all the dignity that befits our rank, Baroness. I beg, as a special favor, from to-day on, no more familiarity with the untitled.

Mad. B.—The favor's granted, Countess; no more familiarity for me.

Mad. R.—M. Naquart marries Angélique. If we could make him also leave the common herd; he's a good fellow, whose merits entitle him to become one of us, Baroness.

Mad. B.—Oh! he will, Countess; he's bargaining for a Marquisate now.

Mad. R.—A Marquisate, sister, did you say a Marquisate? M. Naquart a Marquis? The Marquis Naquart! Well, that would be funny, for 'tis a name that certainly never was intended to have a title prefixed. (They hear music in the distance.)

Enter the Schoolmaster.

Schoolmaster.—My young people are quite ready, Madame, but as I see the village clerk coming with a number of people and bringing some papers to be signed, in order not to interrupt or to be interrupted, they'll await yonder, if you like, 'till your business is finished.

Madame Recorder.—'Twill soon be done.

Enter M. Blandineau, M. Naquart, the Count, the Village Clerk, Angélique and Lisette.

Madame Recorder.—Come, make haste, Clerk; is all as it should be, Monsieur Naquart?

Naquart.—I have had all prepared as carefully for you, Madame, as for myself. You have only to read, Clerk——

Clerk.—(Reading.) "Before Bastian Trigaudinet——

Lisette.—Pshaw! this reading is simply so much time thrown away. My! but you have little impatience, Madame. 'Twill delay your title a full hour.

Naq.—The eagerness I feel to become your nephew——

Count.—My excessive love causes me to suffer severely, I must admit, at the slightest delay.

Mad. R.—O you love-sick darling! It shall never be said that I was less eager than you, dearest Count. Come, I'm ready to sign, Clerk. (She signs.) Now 'tis your turn, Count. (He signs.) And now yours, Monsieur Naquart.

Naq.—'Twould not be gallant were I more distrustful than you, Madame; I sign blindly.

Mad. R.—Truly, you run a great risk! Now, for you, niece.

Angelique.—I do not examine at all, aunt. I am satisfied to fulfill your desires.

Mad. R.—'Tis a wise choice. Now, will you not also sign, Baron de Limpwaddle?

Blandineau.—I am careful never to refuse my signature to marriages that please me. I have wished for a long time to see you the wife of M. Naquart and to give Angélique to the Count.

Mad. R.—Very well, Monsieur, if this be true, I warn you do not sign, for 'tis quite the opposite of what you wish. 'Tis Angélique who is Madame Naquart, while I am the Countess.

Clerk.—Not at all, Madame; not at all; you've got it twisted: though I am only a village notary, I make no such gross blunders.

Mad. R.—What! I've got it twisted. You're only a fool, Clerk; I haven't got that twisted.

Clerk.—No, plague take me, Madame——

Mad. R.—Humph! this is a pretty fellow, Lisette!

Lis.—'Tis idle to dispute, Madame. He must know better than you; remember, he drew the contracts.

Mad. R.—Monsieur Naquart!

Naq.—'Tis a mistake, Madame, a misunderstanding; but one very difficult to rectify.

Mad. R.—Difficult or not, I warrant you, neither the Count nor I propose to be the dupe of a mistake; am I not right, dearest Count?

Count.—No, Madame, I shall not be a dupe, but I shall certainly profit by the mistake.

Mad. R.—What! you will profit by it, you faithless fellow! To lose me you call profit?

Naq.—I do not count that way, Madame; my greatest happiness will be to possess you.

Mad. R.—But you will never possess me, Monsieur Naquart; do what you will, you shall never possess me, I tell you.

Blan.—Your signature, Madame, attests the contrary.

Lis.—Would you trouble the Clerk to rewrite all that, Madame?

Clerk.—'Twould be a lot of trouble, Madame, to say the least; a lot of trouble.

Mad. R.—Madame Naquart! I should be called Madame Naquart! I'd rather be dead.

Naq.—If 'tis only a question of the name, Madame, you shall be called Countess, if you will. The Count's estate now belongs to me; I'll return it at my death and make him my sole heir; you have done the same for your niece. They will surely be willing to relinquish a title which pleases you.

Count.—Most willing, Monsieur; we are yours to command.

Mad. R.—'Tis an arrangement which alters the matter entirely, and, provided I can have my own carriage and you are no longer an attorney——

Naq.—Your every wish shall be satisfied, Madame.

Mad. R.—I want three lackeys—the most stalwart and magnificent in Paris.

Naq.—You shall have four, if you like.

Mad. R.—We'll occupy the same house, Baroness.

Madame Blandineau.—And share the expense of a stately concierge, Countess.

Mad. R.—Yes, quite willingly. I've been long convinced that I should win a title and cut a figure. (To the Count.) You'll bitterly regret me, you little villain, bitterly regret me; but I shall soon be a widow. Come, Schoolmaster, we'll now listen to a little song or two while awaiting dinner, and, when 'tis ready, let the butler of my sister, the Baroness, so announce, but with proper ceremony and all the deference due our rank.

Paul Ekler & Co.